

Landscape of Power, Landscape of Identity:  
The Transforming Human Relationship with the  
Kootenai River Valley  
by  
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## ABSTRACT

The Kootenai River landscape of southwestern British Columbia, northwestern Montana and the very northern tip of Idaho helped unify the indigenous Ktunaxa tribe and guided tribal lifestyles for centuries. However, the Ktunaxa bands' intimate connection with the river underwent a radical transformation during the nineteenth century. This study analyzes how the Ktunaxa relationship with the Kootenai River faced challenges presented by a new understanding of the meaning of landscape introduced by outside groups who began to ply the river's waters in the early 1800s. As the decades passed, the establishment of novel boundaries, including the new U.S.-Canadian border and reserve/reservation delineations, forever altered Ktunaxa interaction with the land. The very meaning of the river for the Ktunaxa as a source of subsistence, avenue of transportation and foundation of spiritual identity experienced similar modifications. In a matter of decades, authoritarian lines on foreign maps imposed a concept of landscape far removed from the tribe's relatively fluid and shifting understanding of boundary lines represented by the river at the heart of the Ktunaxa homeland.

This thesis draws on early ethnographic work with the Ktunaxa tribe in addition to the journals of early traders and missionaries in the Kootenai region to describe how the Ktunaxa way of life transformed during the nineteenth century. The works of anthropologist Keith Basso and environmental philosopher David Abram are used to develop an understanding of the powerful implications of the separation of the Ktunaxa people from the landscape so essential to tribal identity and lifestyle. Two different understandings of boundaries and the human relationship with the natural world clashed

along the Kootenai River in the 1800s, eventually leading to the separation of the valley's indigenous inhabitants from each other and from the land itself.

What water had once connected, lines on maps now divided, redefining this extensive landscape and its meaning for the Ktunaxa people. However, throughout decades of dominance of the Western mapmakers' worldview and in spite of the overwhelming influence of this Euro-American approach to the environment, members of the Ktunaxa tribe have been able to maintain much of their traditional culture.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

A drive along the Kootenai River as it flows through portions of British Columbia, Idaho and Montana offers an extraordinarily beautiful journey through lush green forests, spacious valleys and rocky gorges. The narrow and curvy ribbon of asphalt follows bends in the river for mile after mile. Many mornings, wispy grey fog rolls off the smoothly flowing waters and envelops the trees along the river's banks until the sun finally reaches high enough over the tops of the tall mountains that closely hem in the Kootenai River Valley. Large numbers of waterfowl bob along the shore, especially as they migrate through the region in the spring and fall. A driver in this area of dense forests and undulating terrain must remain constantly vigilant to avoid the copious quantities of deer, moose, and other wildlife common in this riverine landscape. Except for the snaking roadway, it is still possible to travel for miles without any other evidence of human habitation.

This pleasant meandering along the Kootenai's banks drastically contrasts, however, with a different route through the same region. For hundreds of miles a very unnatural line runs through this landscape. Traveling straight up and down hills, dividing valleys and meadows, and bisecting watersheds, a twenty-foot wide strip of clear-cut forest runs straight east and west through this land. Unlike the Kootenai River which follows the natural curves of this mountainous environment, the U.S.-Canadian border arbitrarily divides the landscape. The stark dichotomy between these two tracks through the Kootenai landscape serves as a useful metaphor for a fundamental change in the



understanding of natural environments that the region and its residents faced during the nineteenth century.

As it flows through southwestern British Columbia, northwestern Montana and the very northern tip of Idaho, the Kootenai River links together an otherwise impenetrable landscape of impressive mountains and dense verdant forests. Leaving its headwaters in the Canadian Rockies, the broadening river flows southward into the United States before making a great arc and returning to the north toward its eventual junction with the mighty Columbia River. The Kootenai courses through dangerous, narrow canyons and meanders through wide valleys. At its southernmost point, the river pours over Kootenai Falls, the last freely flowing waterfall on a major tributary of the Columbia. Moist air from the Pacific provides for a lush environment along the Kootenai's banks, including stands of ancient cedar and riparian habitat for mammals such as deer, elk, beaver, and muskrat. Below the river's undulating surface flourishes a wealth of aquatic life including numerous species of trout and the enormous and endangered Kootenai River white sturgeon.

As the dominant feature in the region, the Kootenai River has long been utilized by humans as well. The Kootenai's drainage represents the traditional homeland of the Ktunaxa tribe. The river functioned as an indispensable travel corridor that linked the Ktunaxa, otherwise spread out into several distinct bands along its banks, into a unified confederacy. The waters also provided a substantial food source and, perhaps most importantly, represented significant spiritual power for the Ktunaxa people. The river helped to define Ktunaxa lifestyles and cultural identity for centuries, and many of their

seasonal movements and subsistence patterns revolved around the river's cyclical changes.

However, the Ktunaxa bands' associations with the river which unified their vast territory underwent a radical transformation during the nineteenth century. This study analyzes how the Ktunaxa's relationship with the Kootenai River faced challenges presented by a new understanding of the meaning of landscape introduced by outside groups who began to ply the river's waters in the early 1800s. As the decades passed, the establishment of novel boundaries including the new U.S.-Canadian border and reserve/reservation delineations forever altered Ktunaxa use of the land. Power relations between the various users, both new and longstanding, found themselves revolutionized by these transformations. The very meaning of the Kootenai River for the Ktunaxa as a source of subsistence, avenue of transportation and foundation of spiritual identity experienced similar modifications. In the course of a matter of decades, authoritarian lines on foreign maps came to dominate Ktunaxa lifestyles by imposing a concept of landscape far removed from the tribe's relatively fluid and shifting understanding of boundary lines represented by the river at the heart of the Ktunaxa homeland. What water had once connected, lines on maps now divided, forever redefining this extensive landscape and its meaning for the Ktunaxa people.

The transformation in the meaning of landscape that occurred along the Kootenai River in the nineteenth century parallels similar changes occurring across the continent as Euro-American outsiders brought with them radically different understandings of the natural world to the diverse environments they encountered. The Kootenai River Valley offers a particularly transparent case study of this process, and this clarity is due to a

number of factors. In the first place, a very complex relationship existed between the individual Ktunaxa bands and the natural world in pre-contact times. Also, the arrival of Euro-Americans in the Kootenai region came much later than for other tribes. When these outsiders began to arrive, one of North America's most celebrated cartographers, David Thompson, negotiated early relations with the Ktunaxa. As a leading trader for the North West Company, Thompson successfully negotiated within the worlds of the Columbia Basin tribes by working within centuries-old trading structures while at the same time firmly introducing to the region a Western appreciation of landscape as something to be mapped and divided. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the effects of the introduction of new boundaries, including separating the tribe into different reservations and dividing them across an international border, have been particularly profound for the Ktunaxa people.

This thesis is organized around three distinct phases in the process of transformation that occurred in the meaning of the Kootenai River environment in the nineteenth century. After this introduction, the first chapter of this thesis provides a glimpse of the far-reaching importance of the Kootenai River to the Ktunaxa people prior to the arrival of outsiders around 1800. The chapter begins with a summary of the Ktunaxa origin story in order to exhibit the essential role the region's environment plays in Ktunaxa tribal identity. This is followed by an examination of the unique adaptations the individual Ktunaxa bands developed in order to live in their watershed-based homeland as well as the tribe's relationship with the broader region beyond the Kootenai River Valley. Finally, several conclusions are presented regarding Ktunaxa concepts of boundaries and landscape in general.

This discussion of the Kootenai's significance for pre-contact Ktunaxa culture is followed by an examination of the early years of interaction after Canadian fur traders and Jesuit missionaries first crossed the Rocky Mountains and entered the Kootenai Valley. This chapter focuses on the early relationship between the Ktunaxa bands and these Euro-American outsiders, noting the relative peace and some of the mutual benefits enjoyed by both parties during the first decades of this cultural exchange. Nevertheless, underneath this cordial relationship appear the catalysts for a phase of radically different change soon to come. The worldviews of cartographer and explorer David Thompson and Jesuit priest Pierre-Jean De Smet in particular represent a new understanding of the landscape long inhabited by the Ktunaxa people.

The devastating results of the ideas introduced by the early fur traders and missionaries for the Ktunaxa people are the subjects of the next chapter. Two events characterize the profound consequences of these new understandings of the natural world. Both the Anglo-American Oregon Treaty of 1846 that formed the modern U.S.-Canadian border and the Hellgate Treaty of 1855 that established the Flathead Reservation radically altered the Ktunaxa world.<sup>1</sup> Analysis based on the meanings of place and its importance to identity will offer suggestions as to how these regional changes impacted the Kootenai Valley regions's indigenous residents' relationship with the river and, most importantly, how this transformation challenged the continued maintenance of Ktunaxa culture and way of life.

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<sup>1</sup> Oregon Treaty, "Treaty with Great Britain, in Regard to Limits Westward of the Rocky Mountains," *Perfected International Treaties, 1778-1945*, National Archives Microfilm Publication M1247, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State), and Hellgate Treaty, "Treaty with the Flatheads, Etc." *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, Charles J. Kappler, ed. Volume 2, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1904-1979), 722-725.

The concluding chapter offers analysis of the broader implications of this new Western understanding of the Kootenai River landscape. Not only did the Euro-American approach to the natural world change the Ktunaxa bands' physical relationships with the environment, it also affected the Ktunaxa people's understanding of cultural identity, spirituality, and history. A discussion will also be included of some of the tribe's current initiatives to counter the separating effects of this new worldview and to foster education in the tribe's traditional approach to the environment.

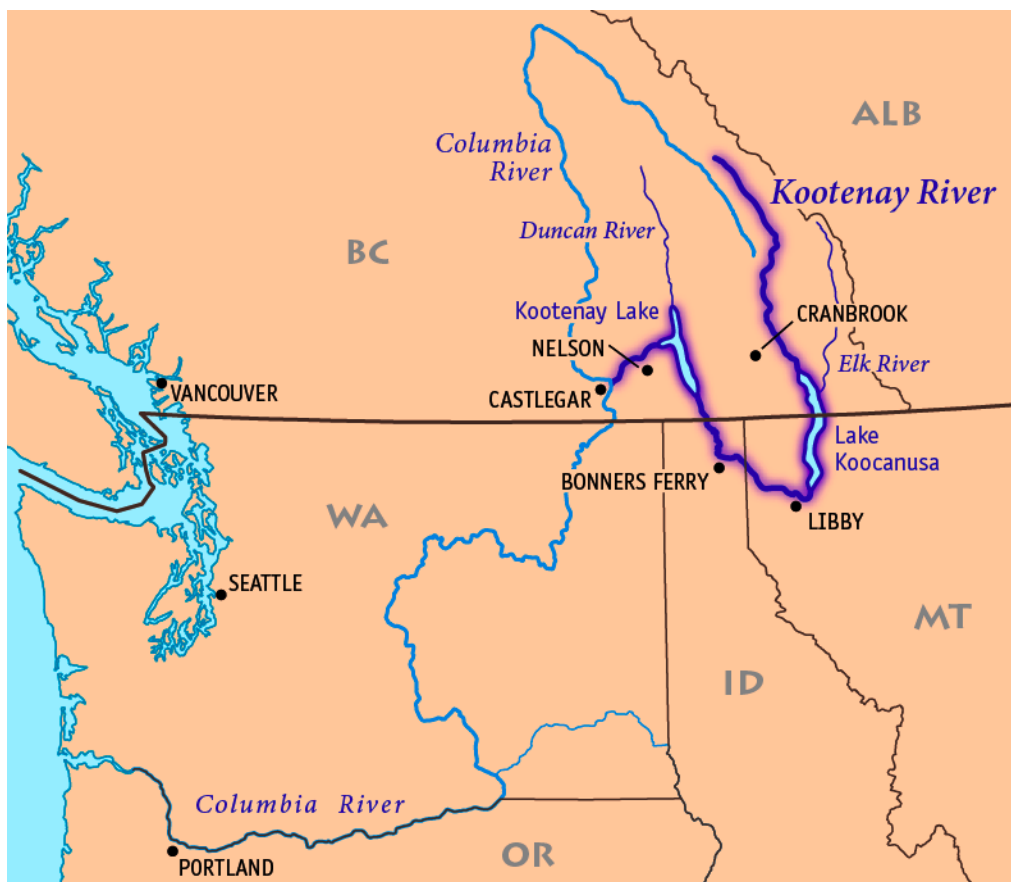


Figure 1: Map of the Kootenai (Kootenay) and Columbia Rivers<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> This map includes the Canadian spelling, *Kootenay*, rather than the American *Kootenai*.

The Kootenai River takes a long meandering path to reach its final destination, the mighty Columbia River. At Canal Flats, near the Kootenai's headwaters, a two-mile patch of meadow is all that separates it from the Columbia. However, by twisting around the region's many natural barriers and following the curves of the land, the rivers take hundreds of miles to join again. The Kootenai River's seemingly undecided course has also contributed to the relative isolation of the Kootenai region which, coupled with the high mountains surrounding the valley, has limited the reasons for outsiders to travel through the area.

The Kootenai River Valley landscape is characterized by a remarkable diversity of climate and ecological types. Just above its mouth at the Columbia is the sprawling 62 mile-long Kootenay Lake. Like much of the environment below the great falls of the Kootenai, this area is characterized by high rainfall totals and relatively mild winters. Historically during the spring runoff the wide valleys of this region would flood for months at a time. A short distance upstream, several other valleys are closely hemmed in by high mountains ranges and provided beneficial opportunities for shelter during the winter. Above the great bend, the grasslands of the Tobacco Plains resemble more closely the prairies on the east side of the Rocky Mountains than the Pacific rainforest downstream. At the very headwaters of the Kootenai are found the majestic peaks and glaciers of the ten-thousand-foot-high Canadian Rockies, a harsh climate in both summer and winter.

Today, the Kootenai River Valley has changed remarkably little from the spectacular land recorded by the first Euro-Americans to view it in the early nineteenth

century. For much of its course, the Kootenai runs unimpeded, and Kootenai Falls remains the last undammed waterfall on a major tributary of the Columbia. Several dams have been built just above the mouth of the river, and Libby Dam in Montana impounds the nearly one-hundred-mile long Lake Koocanusa. Still, there are vast sections where the river meanders freely along densely forested banks with few signs of development. The Kootenai River remains the dominant natural feature in this landscape and during the spring runoff can still show its mighty power.

The people who traditionally called this extraordinary landscape home were as varied and unique as the environment that surrounded them. The several distinct bands of the Ktunaxa tribe that lived along the banks of the Kootenai exhibit a great diversity with respect to the adaptations they developed in order to thrive in the microclimates that make up the Kootenai River Valley. Their relatively isolated homeland led them to develop a distinct language remarkably unlike that spoken by any other native people in North America. They were master fishermen who employed techniques perfectly suited for particular sections of the river. They were also expert hunters specialized in the species that inhabited the river valley who also displayed great skill at hunting bison hundreds of miles to the east on the Great Plains.

The Euro-Americans who first entered the Kootenai River Valley in the early nineteenth century made little attempt to understand the local environment in the intimate ways that the Ktunaxa knew their homeland. The prospect of material wealth and souls to convert dominated their mindset. Though slow to move into the region in large numbers, the new understandings of the natural world these outsiders carried with them radically altered both the Kootenai landscape and the cultures of its pre-contact inhabitants.

For the most part, the Kootenai region as a whole has remained marginal in studies of western U.S. and Canadian history. The small population and relative remoteness of the area have done little to encourage an abundance of academic scholarship. Nevertheless, a number of unique characteristics pertaining to Ktunaxa culture have interested a few anthropologists. Franz Boas and Alexander Chamberlain undertook the first ethnographic field work with the Ktunaxa tribe in the early twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> In the 1930s and 1940s, anthropologists Claude Schaeffer and Harry Holbert Turney-High conducted much more extensive studies of the tribe.<sup>4</sup> Turney-High's work, published through the American Anthropological Association, has become the classic piece of scholarship on the Ktunaxa. Though Schaeffer failed to publish much of his work, his field notes have fortunately been preserved at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, Alberta.

More recent ethnographic work on the Ktunaxa in the United States includes a 1983 ethnohistory of the tribe by Cynthia Manning who synthesized much of the earlier scholarship on the tribe.<sup>5</sup> This is accompanied by a large quantity of other 'grey literature' written by employees of the Kootenai National Forest and the Army Corps of

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<sup>3</sup> Franz Boas, "Kutenai Tales", *Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin* 59 (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1918). Alexander F. Chamberlain, "The Kootenay Indians," *Annual Archaeological Report of Ontario* 12 (Toronto: Ontario Provincial Government, 1905).

<sup>4</sup> Claude Schaeffer, "The Subsistence Quest of the Kutenai: A Study of the Interaction of Culture and Environment" (Phd diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1940). Harry Holbert Turney-High, "Ethnography of the Kutenai" *Memoirs of the American Anthropological Association* 56 (Menasha, WI: American Anthropological Association, 1941).

<sup>5</sup> Cynthia J. Manning, "An Ethnohistory of the Kootenai Indians" (M.A. thesis, University of Montana, Missoula, 1983).



Engineers for use in resource management along the river.<sup>6</sup> The Kootenai Cultural Committee of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribe has also commissioned several recent works and conducted its own scholarship on tribal traditions and oral histories.<sup>7</sup> In order to protect sensitive cultural knowledge, much of this work is understandably out of reach for non-Ktunaxa scholars.

Compared to some of the neighboring Plains tribes such as the Blackfeet or Cheyenne, scholarship on the Ktunaxa remains relatively limited. It is debatable whether this is due to the relative isolation of the region, the dispersion of the Ktunaxa tribe across an international border on several reservations, or the comparatively small population numbers of the Ktunaxa bands. Regardless of its causes, this scarcity of information on the tribe means that resources are also quite limited, and if Turney-High or one of the few early ethnographers misunderstood some aspect of Ktunaxa culture, it has had a tendency to be propagated by others with even less knowledge of the culture.

There is also a relatively small collection of works devoted to the early fur trade and missionary presence in the region. The primary sources of the traders and missionaries themselves include the extensive works by explorers David Thompson and Ross Cox and the memoirs of missionaries Father De Smet and Nicholas Point.<sup>8</sup> After

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<sup>6</sup> Examples of this include work conducted by Alston Thoms and others along Lake Koocanusa; see Alston Thoms, et al. *Cultural Resources Investigations for Libby Reservoir, Northwest Montana. Volume 1, Environment, Archaeology, and Land Use Patterns in the Middle Kootenai River Valley* (Pullman, WA: Washington State University, 1984) and Rebecca S. Timmons, *Kootenai National Forest Prehistoric Overview* (Libby, MT: Kootenai National Forest, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> One example is: Kootenai Cultural Committee, *Kootenai Legends* (Pablo, MT: Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes' Kootenai Culture Committee, 1982).

<sup>8</sup> David Thompson, *David Thompson's Narrative*, Joseph Burr Tyrell, editor, (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1916), Ross Cox, *The Columbia River*, Edgar Stewart ed. (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), Pierre-Jean De Smet, S.J. *Oregon Missions and Travels over the Rocky Mountains in 1845-46* (Fairfield, WA: Ye Galleon Press, 1978).

being nearly forgotten about for close to a century, David Thompson has been the subject of numerous studies in recent years, and the Jesuit presence in western Montana has long interested scholars.<sup>9</sup> Though neither the Kootenai River Valley nor the Ktunaxa tribe are the primary subjects of any of these works, these texts do provide enough information to gain an understanding of the broad relationship between these outsiders and this isolated region and its human inhabitants.

These sources provide a glimpse of how the Kootenai River Valley and its residents appeared to the first Euro-Americans who entered the Ktunaxa homeland. Though this literature is also helpful in understanding Ktunaxa traditions and the significance of the regional landscape for the tribe, there has been little focus on how the contribution of the Ktunaxa relationship with the land to cultural identity may have transformed as the tribe faced the enormous changes introduced by outside understandings of the Kootenai River landscape during the nineteenth century. By analyzing the role of the environment and the significant part it played in defining Ktunaxa existence, it may be possible to gain a better understanding of the drastic consequences this century of change brought to the Ktunaxa people. No discussion of the meaning of Ktunaxa cultural identity can be complete without an analysis of the Ktunaxa understanding of place.

The goal of this study is to provide this missing piece of scholarship. The natural environment was fundamental to the Ktunaxa way of life, and their knowledge of it was deeply interconnected with spirituality and identity. Appreciating the profound

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<sup>9</sup> Examples include: Jack Nisbet, *Sources of the River: Tracking David Thomson Across Western North America* (Seattle, WA: Sasquatch Books, 1994), and Jacqueline Peterson and Laura L Peers, *Sacred Encounters : Father De Smet and the Indians of the Rocky Mountain West*, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993).

philosophical differences between the Ktunaxa understanding of place, landscape and boundaries and the Euro-American worldview can also help us comprehend the full impacts of the displacement to reservations that affected so many native peoples in the nineteenth century.

This study is based on the two principle sets of sources noted above. The first includes ethnohistorical sources on the Ktunaxa, primarily the works of Harry Holbert Turney-High and Claude Schaeffer, due to the lack of access to some of the more recent Ktunaxa-produced scholarship discussed above. The second comprises the primary sources of the early Euro-Americans, including David Thompson and Father De Smet. Most of these materials were made available to the author from the archives of the Kootenai National Forest during seasonal work for the forest's Heritage Program.

Because of the huge geographical area the Kootenai River Valley covers and the enormous extent of the landscape traditionally utilized by the individual Ktunaxa bands, it is necessary to limit the scope of this study. In the first chapter dedicated to the Ktunaxa use of the environment, this discussion is fairly broad due to the importance of establishing the wide range of Ktunaxa use of the Kootenai landscape and the far-reaching extent of their travels. However, when studying the entrance of Euro-American outsiders to the region and especially when analyzing the subsequent effects of these new philosophies regarding landscape on Ktunaxa culture, attention will be directed primarily towards the bands that inhabited the southernmost section of the river. The Libby-Jennings Band in particular, today part of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes on the Flathead Indian Reservation, has perhaps suffered the most profound effects of the

transformation discussed here, and a focus on this single band allows for a more in-depth perspective.

Before continuing this discussion, it is necessary to qualify the use of the term Ktunaxa to identify the people of the Kootenai River Valley. Though an overarching unity certainly exists, most Ktunaxa prefer to identify themselves primarily through their specific band identity. Euro-American outsiders, frequently oblivious to complex tribal groupings, instead focused on the broadest political structure which they termed the Kootenai Tribe. Over the years, countless different names have been used to designate this group. At one point the Bureau of American Ethnology identified more than seventy different variations of the term Kootenai.<sup>10</sup> Place names in the United States typically use the spelling “Kootenai” while in Canada many natural features are identified as “Kootenay.” Most ethnographers have chosen the spelling “Kutenai.” This paper employs the term Ktunaxa instead to describe the overarching political structure and the common spiritual and subsistence practices it encompasses for various reasons: Ktunaxa is the word used by tribal members when referring to the bands’ unifying political structure, as evidenced by its employment by the Ktunaxa Nation Council, the inter-band organization of tribal leaders.<sup>11</sup> The use of Ktunaxa is also helpful in distinguishing the indigenous inhabitants of the region from the geographical features of the river valley they have long called home.

A caution is also necessary on the use of terminology in this work such as “traditional Ktunaxa lifestyle,” which may suggest that Ktunaxa society and culture

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<sup>10</sup> Frederick Webb Hodge, “Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico,” *Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin* 30 (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1912), 742.

<sup>11</sup> Ktunaxa Nation Council, <http://www.ktunaxa.org.htm>

remained static throughout time. Of course as with all peoples, Ktunaxa lifestyles most likely changed over centuries of living along the Kootenai River. The goal in the following chapter is to present the Ktunaxa way of life in the years just prior to contact with Euro-Americans. As most of the documentation used was either written from the perspectives of the white fur traders and missionaries or by anthropologists after decades of outside influence, there are assuredly limits to how accurate a portrait can be painted today of Ktunaxa life at this moment in history. However, by incorporating a variety of accounts, supplemented by available oral traditions, an attempt has been made to present a close approximation of several of the tribe's most important subsistence traits and, more significantly, to explore the broad themes that encompassed this period in Ktunaxa history.

This thesis will draw on place and cultural landscape theories to gain a better understanding of the significance of landscape for those who interacted with it. Concepts advanced by anthropologist Keith Basso and environmental philosopher David Abram contribute to the theoretical framework for this study. Neither of these authors specifically addresses the Ktunaxa in their studies, and both works are quite different in their subject matter. Nonetheless, both provide a lens through which the Ktunaxa view of the connection between identity and the natural world can be more fully understood by Euro-American outsiders, who have grown up in a world of maps and boundaries, and can encourage a better appreciation for how many of the native inhabitants of North America have traditionally understood and continue to understand the natural world.

Keith Basso's *Wisdom Sits in Places* is particularly useful in examining Ktunaxa relationships with the land, as he demonstrates the fundamental differences between the

ways in which indigenous groups interpret meaning in their lived environment and how many Westerners understand the same places.<sup>12</sup> Through his work with the Western Apache in Arizona, Basso discovered that individual places and the names associated with them not only denote specific geographical sites, but they also carry moral and historical lessons. *Wisdom Sits in Places* ultimately describes the many ways in which the land itself helps to maintain Western Apache identity. This current study of the Ktunaxa homeland suggests that many similar conclusions can also be drawn about the relationship between the Ktunaxa and the landscape they knew so well.

In developing an understanding of the implications of the transformation of the traditional Ktunaxa relationship with the natural world in the nineteenth century, this analysis will greatly benefit from David Abram's exploration of this topic in *The Spell of the Sensuous*.<sup>13</sup> Abram studies the drastic physical, emotional and cultural consequences produced by the Western separation from what he terms the 'more-than-human world.' While it may be difficult to appreciate by cultural outsiders, the placement of arbitrary boundaries and limits across a landscape has had a devastating impact in separating groups of people from the natural world. Combined with Basso's assessment of the important role the environment plays in maintaining cultural identity for a native people such as the Ktunaxa, Abram's work demonstrates the powerful consequences of the imposition of reservation lines and international borders across the Kootenai landscape

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<sup>12</sup> Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1996).

which exceed the immediate effect of simply limiting the movement of Ktunaxa individuals.

The Kootenai River Valley is truly a unique and fascinating landscape, and its traditional inhabitants are a diverse and remarkable people. The complex association between the Ktunaxa and their environment endured for hundreds of years, and this reality makes the situation faced by the Ktunaxa bands at the turn of the twentieth century all the more remarkable and tragic. This study seeks to uncover the profound impact of the confrontation of radically divergent worldviews on the daily lives of the Ktunaxa.

The Kootenai River Valley has served as the homeland of generations of Ktunaxa people. This is a story of the landscape they knew and how they understood it. It is also a story of the introduction of radically different understandings of the natural world and the powerful effects of these new ideas on the traditional inhabitants of the Kootenai River region. Finally, it is also a story of how the individual Ktunaxa bands have been able to retain their identity as a people in spite of these extraordinary challenges.

## CHAPTER TWO

### A FLUID LANDSCAPE

“The Kutenai are proud of their country and justly so, for it is probably the most favorable part of the Plateau for Indian life. It is an area of both rugged and gentle mountains, well watered, beautifully forested, and well stocked with game and fish. That it is an area of great scenic beauty is attested by the number of United States and Canadian national parks it contains.”<sup>14</sup>

-Harry Holbert Turney-High (1941)

The overall relationship between the Ktunaxa and the surrounding natural environment prior to encounters with Euro-Americans in the early nineteenth century is best symbolized by the river itself that links this region together. The Kootenai River makes a circuitous journey through the region, avoiding barriers and following the most natural course while taking hundreds of extra miles to join the Columbia River. In the process an enormous swath of land is unified by the river’s movement through the environment. There are no straight lines and no arbitrary boundaries here. Instead, this river listens to the seasons, going where the landscape tells it to go. And it works largely in harmony with the natural world that surrounds it.

The Ktunaxa people maintained a seasonal cycle of movement through the landscape centered on the Kootenai River Valley. Like the river, they listened to their environment and became intimately attuned to the vast resources the land provided and its many subtle variations. As the seasons changed, the Ktunaxa followed. Individual bands understood their immediate surroundings and followed an annual subsistence cycle that differed from their neighbors only a short distance away, and by doing so proved their vast knowledge of the local environment.

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<sup>14</sup> Harry Holbert Turney-High, “Ethnography of the Kutenai,” *Memoirs of the American Anthropological Association*, 56 (Menasha, WI: American Anthropological Association, 1941), 23.



While each of the tribe's individual bands had a primary geographical homeland, boundaries between bands and neighboring tribes remained somewhat blurry rather than fixed and absolute.<sup>15</sup> Like the river coursing through the center of this landscape, the Ktunaxa moved through the environment in a constantly fluid motion, respecting natural features by curving and meandering through the mountains and dense forests. Territorial limits between Ktunaxa bands and neighboring tribes were delineated based on reciprocal relations, kinship, history, and spirituality rather than ideas of ownership and property.

No indiscriminate boundary lines limited the movement of the Ktunaxa people across the landscape. Individuals and entire bands frequently traversed great distances across the Rocky Mountains, down the Columbia River, and far to the south in order to hunt, fish, trade with allies, or engage in warfare against enemies. Such long-distance travel could frequently be dangerous and, especially when crossing on to the Great Plains, could lead to conflicts with other tribes. Nevertheless, it is remarkable the vast expanse of land the Ktunaxa bands included in their knowledge base.

This chapter explores the Ktunaxa-Kootenai River comparison in a number of ways. It first examines the significant role played by the river and its adjacent environment in the everyday lives of the Ktunaxa people. It then complicates any conclusion that the Ktunaxa were a river-based people trapped within their immediate landscape, by exploring the vast knowledge the Ktunaxa maintained of far distant lands. Finally, using ideas proposed by anthropologist Keith Basso and environmental philosopher David Abram, an effort will be made to understand the how the Ktunaxa people understood landscape and boundaries prior to contact with Euro-Americans.

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<sup>15</sup> Cynthia J. Manning, "An Ethnohistory of the Kootenai Indians," (Master's Thesis, University of Montana, 1983), 32.

## *A River People*

Much of traditional Ktunaxa life centered on the Kootenai River, its tributaries and the many lakes that dot the region. Along with the numerous benefits of the waters themselves, the broad valleys and dense forests that comprise much of the adjacent landscape provided the well-adapted Ktunaxa with a great wealth of resources. Even beyond its prodigious qualifications as a bountiful source of subsistence, the Kootenai River served other significant roles for the tribe. The river helped connect the many detached Ktunaxa bands into a single unified tribe and aided transportation and communication. Perhaps most importantly, the river was also intricately connected to the Ktunaxa spiritual understanding of the world and their own existence.

The Kootenai River could be both a caring provider and a violent and unpredictable neighbor. Compared with much of the greater region, the Kootenai River Valley experiences relatively mild winters and makes the region an agreeable place to live for most of the year. Spring floods, however, could dramatically alter this idyllic setting, sending a torrent of water careening through the narrow canyons and spilling out to create broad marshes in the low-lying valleys. The massive Kootenai Falls and its narrow canyon near the southern bend of the river could make travel quite difficult at times. Still, the Kootenai, with both its hazards and benefits, dominated much of the lives of the people who lived along its banks.

The significance of the remarkable Kootenai River landscape to the Ktunaxa people is strongly evident in the traditional story of the tribe's creation. According to tribal elder Wilfred Jacobs, the land had once suffered from the presence of an unruly sea

monster, Yawu?nik.<sup>16</sup> After a council of all the animals determined that the monster must be killed, the chief animal, Nałmuqçin, went after him. The chase followed the river from its source, down to the Columbia River and eventually back to the headwaters of the Kootenai. Along the way, Nałmuqçin gave names to many of the places that the battle passed. Finally, once Yawu?nik was corralled and slain, Nałmuqçin wiped the blood from his hands on the grass and created the Ktunaxa people.<sup>17</sup>

As this portion of the tribe's oral history demonstrates, the Kootenai River is consequently not only inscribed with the meanings placed there by generations of habitation, but its waters are intimately connected with Ktunaxa spirituality and cultural identity. The animals that inhabit the river and its adjacent environment also play a very large role in the tribe's storytelling tradition.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, a substantial number of the Ktunaxa's traditional ceremonies are either related to the river's waters, fishing practices, or the river's annual cycles.<sup>19</sup>

The central role played by waterways such as the Kootenai River in the region's environment has also greatly determined the daily lives of the Ktunaxa people in many physical ways which will be discussed in the following pages. The tribe developed a great diversity of adaptations to slight localized differences within the riparian landscape.

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<sup>16</sup> Wilfred Jacobs, "Ktunaxa Creation Story" *Ktunaxa Nation Council*, <http://www.ktunaxa.org/who/creation.html>.

<sup>17</sup> This is only a short synopsis of the detailed story told by Wilfred Jacobs.

<sup>18</sup> Two good sources of traditional Kootenai stories are Kootenai Culture Committee, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, *Ktunaxa Legends* (Pablo, MT: Salish Kootenai College Press, 1997), and Frank B. Linderman, *Kootenai Why Stories*, ed. Celeste River (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

<sup>19</sup> Father De Smet described a fish festival he observed among the Ktunaxa in 1845 in Pierre-Jean De Smet, S.J. *Oregon Missions and Travels over the Rocky Mountains in 1845-46*, (Fairfield, WA: Ye Galleon Press, 1978) 198.

Separate bands of the Ktunaxa tribe, spread out along the Kootenai's banks, are united through an intricate network of kinship, spiritual, and subsistence relationships, and yet they exhibit vastly different characteristics that enabled them to capitalize on their individual territories' diverse resources.

This unique and complex relationship between the Ktunaxa people and their surrounding environment has long frustrated ethnographers attempting to place the Ktunaxa into a particular category of tribes. For more than a century, anthropologists have worked to fit the tribe into a defined typology of Plains or Plateau groupings to little avail. The great multiplicity of Ktunaxa subsistence characteristics, the intricate interrelationships between the separate bands and neighboring tribes, and the vast areas where Ktunaxa roamed each year has left these scientists with a wide range of theories on the tribe's origins, each less satisfactory than the last.

Most observers have noted the existence of one broad division within the tribe based on varied economic practices and slight differences in language. Above a line roughly approximate with the location of Kootenai Falls, Ktunaxa bands exhibited many subsistence traits similar to tribes across the Rocky Mountains on the Great Plains. Below this line, bands had much in common with other Plateau peoples. These differences were reflected in the materials used in the construction of dwellings, the relative importance of different foods in their diet, and whether a particular band was fairly sedentary or more nomadic.

While in a general sense, the broad "upper and lower" partition clearly exists, a much more thorough understanding of the Ktunaxa is gained through an appreciation of the tribal divisions recognized by the Ktunaxa themselves. Much of the confusion for

anthropologists in attempting to categorize the Ktunaxa over the last century has been based on the wide diversity of lifestyles among the seven or more different bands that comprised the Ktunaxa tribe when they were first encountered by Canadian fur traders. These individual bands are distinguished by the specific geographical locations where they wintered along the Kootenai River, and tribal members usually refer to themselves primarily by their band name rather than as members of the larger tribe. According to ethnographer Harry Holbert Turney-High, the author of perhaps the most extensive study of the Ktunaxa, the “Kutenai rarely use a generalized word for the whole people. Unless talking to white men, they use the place name of the band followed by –nek, ‘men of,’ when referring to themselves.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Turney-High, 14.

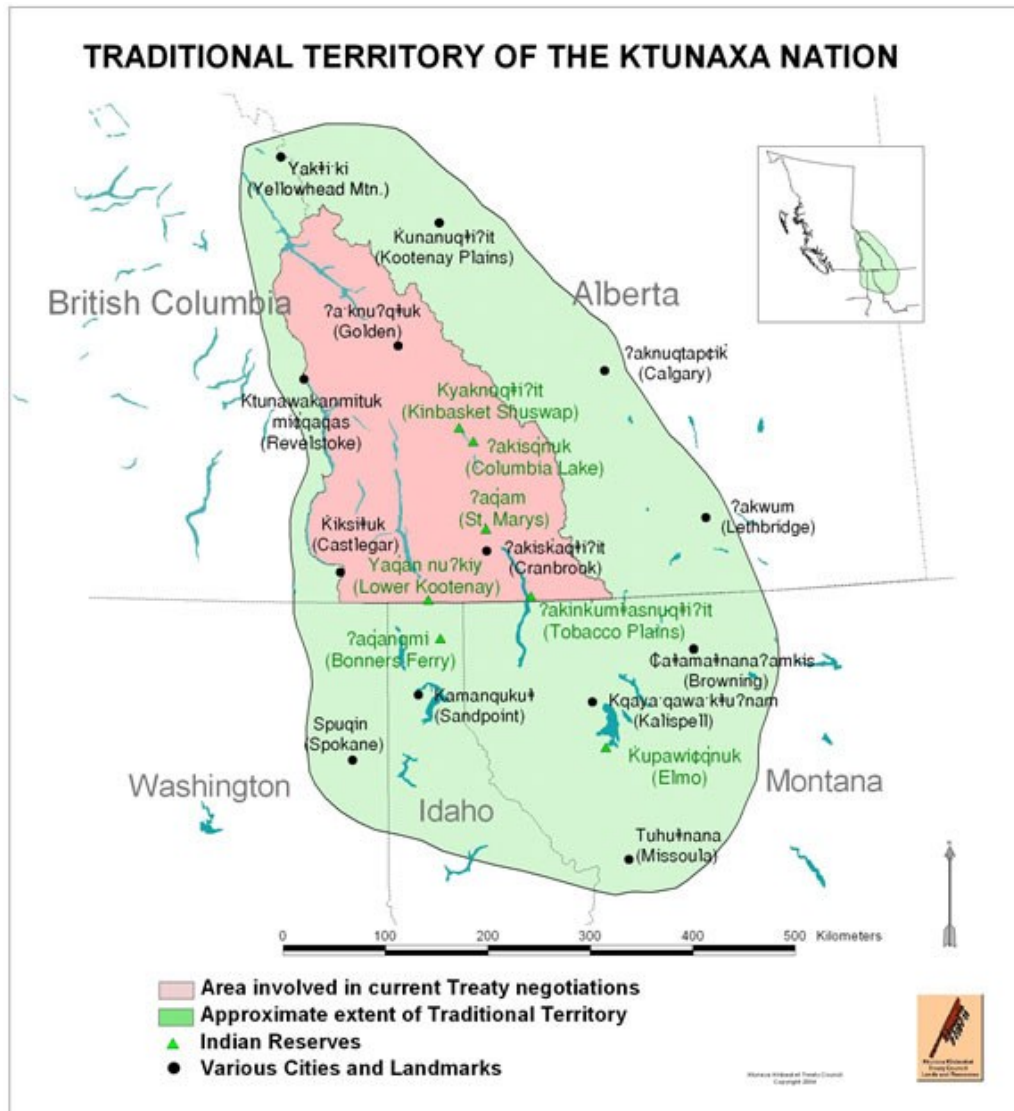


Figure 2.1: Map of Present Ktunaxa Band Locations<sup>21</sup>

The Ktunaxa Nation Council and the Kootenai Culture Committee currently recognize seven Ktunaxa bands.<sup>22</sup> The ?akisqnuuk (Columbia Lake Band), ?Aqam (St.

<sup>21</sup> This map was created by the Ktunaxa Nation Council and is useful in getting a sense of the present location of Ktunaxa bands. However, as much of the rest of the paper will discuss, the boundaries shown here are both problematic and somewhat limiting. Ktunaxa Nation Council, "Traditional Territory of the Ktunaxa Nation," <http://www.ktunaxa.org/who/index.html>

<sup>22</sup> Kootenai Culture Committee, xiii. Ktunaxa Nation Council, "Who We Are" *Ktunaxa Nation Council*, <http://www.ktunaxa.org/who/index.html>. Many ethnographers who have worked with the tribe have

Mary's Band), and the Kyaknuq̓iʔit (Sushwap Band) lived in the upper reaches of the Kootenai River drainage. These upper bands, along with the ʔakinkum̓lasnuq̓iʔit (Tobacco Plains Band) and the Ksanka (Libby-Jennings, later Dayton-Elmo Band), who both lived further south near today's U.S.-Canada border, have frequently been referred to as the Upper Kutenai by anthropologists because they shared several common characteristics such as the prominence of the bison hunt and the use of hide tipis. Further down the river, the ʔaq̓anq̓mi (Bonners Ferry Band) and the Yaq̓an nuʔkiy (Creston Band) have also been grouped together as the Lower Kutenai due to similarities such as the greater importance of fishing and the use of mat-covered lodges.

Though many differences exist between the separate Ktunaxa bands regarding their use of the resources provided by the Kootenai River Valley environment, they remained a single unified tribe for centuries, and the river itself played a large role in maintaining this cohesiveness. Bands visited each other frequently for economic pursuits such as communal gathering in berry-rich areas, fishing or hunting bison.<sup>23</sup> Band membership was fairly flexible with frequent intermarriage between groups and cooperation among members. It is also notable that little evidence exists for intra-tribal warfare in the historical record, nor is it noted by the tribe's ethnographers. While the bands exhibited many differences in their subsistence methods, their common language, traditions and spirituality led to little hostility.

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established different numbers of bands. Modern community names are given as they provide the best way for those unacquainted with the region to identify the band locations.

<sup>23</sup> Manning, 32.

Changes in the composition and location of bands are known to have occurred over the course of time.<sup>24</sup> Diseases in the eighteenth and nineteenth century may have devastated some bands and caused movement and reorganization in others even before direct contact with Euro-Americans. What may have once been separate bands in the Libby and Jennings areas in Montana joined together as one unified group. Still, since the earliest reaches of the tribe's oral traditions the Kootenai River and its surrounding valleys have remained the homeland of the Ktunaxa people and the waters coursing through the landscape the connective tissue that holds the tribe together.

Maintaining a degree of tribal unity through many centuries in this vast and rugged environment required both excellent communication and the ability to travel in order to maintain cultural relationships. With bands spread out along the Kootenai's banks the Ktunaxa relied on the river to help facilitate the preservation of their tribal confederacy. Maritime travel along the Kootenai River was not always easy; Kootenai Falls posed challenges as did the high spring runoff. In the years after the arrival of the horse, other avenues of transportation became more widely available. Still, the region's waters remained paramount especially in the transportation of large numbers of people or goods.

Canoe travel provided the Ktunaxa with a high degree of mobility in the wet Kootenai environment. The bands employed two types of canoes, including an unusual form in which the bow and the stern curve down and outward from the top. Though used in small numbers by some of their Salish neighbors, these "sturgeon-nosed" canoes are

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<sup>24</sup> Turney-High, 16-21.



thought by many anthropologists to be of unique importance to the Ktunaxa.<sup>25</sup> According to Turney-High, “[t]he chief functions of these peculiar and somewhat fine ends [of the “sturgeon-nosed” canoe] was to increase the ease of steering, especially when the canoe was being hard driven. They also increased the draft’s buoyancy when oncoming or following seas were running.”<sup>26</sup> The second canoe type was based on a cedar frame design much more common to the Pacific Northwest and was not used to the same degree as the “sturgeon-nosed” variety. Both of the Ktunaxa canoe types served significant roles for the tribe. They were essential during the fishing season, especially for the bands downriver. Canoes also provided an effective way to transport many people or large quantities of goods. One Ktunaxa informant told Turney-High that a fleet composed of more than one hundred and fifty canoes was once used to carry members of the Libby-Jennings and Tobacco Plains bands on a trip to visit the Ktunaxa living near Windermere.<sup>27</sup>

Though they were spread out over a couple of hundred miles along the Kootenai River, individuals, groups, and sometimes whole bands would frequently travel to visit other Ktunaxa groups. When bands from further up the river planned to go bison hunting they would send a message downriver inviting members of the lower bands to join them. The Bonner’s Ferry and Creston bands would return the offer during their winter deer

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<sup>25</sup> Turney-High, 67-69.

<sup>26</sup> Turney-High, 68.

<sup>27</sup> Turney-High, 69.

hunts and fishing seasons. Interested men would then hurry to join their distant relatives and assist in the communal event.<sup>28</sup>

Bands would also come together for important seasonal ceremonies and for the planting of tobacco. Anthropologists have noted the importance of the Sun Dance for some upper bands in historical times, along with many other seasonal ceremonies such as the Midwinter Festival and Midwinter Dance.<sup>29</sup> Members from several bands might join together for these occasions. Each year wild tobacco plants were also cultivated to be smoked and used for ceremonial purposes by some Ktunaxa bands. Though it might also have been grown at other sites such as Michel's Prairie, the primary tobacco planting grounds were in the Tobacco Plains area near present-day Eureka, Montana. According to one of Claude Schaeffer's Columbia Lakes Band informants Louis Arbell, "all northern Kutenai used to go to Tobacco Plains to get their Tobacco."<sup>30</sup> The many Ktunaxa ceremonies and the spiritual importance of the tobacco plant all prompted seasonal movement among the different Ktunaxa bands.

While the Kootenai River and the adjacent landscape served very significant roles in maintaining the unity of the Ktunaxa tribe, the daily benefits of the local ecosystem as a source of subsistence were of profound importance as well. Fishing, the hunting of waterfowl and local mammals, and the gathering of plants from the river's banks provided differing proportions of the yearly nutritional requirement for the individual Ktunaxa bands. The subsistence quest of each group was intimately connected to the

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<sup>28</sup> Turney-High, 39-44.

<sup>29</sup> Manning, 36-39.

<sup>30</sup> Claude Schaeffer, "Papers," Fort Steele Collection, (Fort Steele, British Columbia, 1966), 111.

unique conditions of their particular portion of the Ktunaxa homeland. And for all of the Ktunaxa bands, the Kootenai River and its tributaries contributed greatly to this pursuit.

For the people living along the lower section of the river, fishing provided a particularly important share of the diet. Fishing followed an annual cycle that took advantage of the movement of the animals through differing environmental conditions. Schaeffer notes several varieties of fish incorporated into the Ktunaxa diet, including numerous species of trout, charr, whitefish, ling, and sucker.<sup>31</sup> Fishing at the end of the spring flood benefitted from high concentrations of trout, charr and whitefish. The Ktunaxa also organized large midwinter communal fishing events which concentrated on ling (or burbot).

The Ktunaxa employed a wide range of complex implements in order to haul in their annual fish harvest. Fishing utilized intricately constructed weirs and traps, fish spears, hooks and line, and nets.<sup>32</sup> During the spring flood, extensive low-lying areas around present-day Bonner's Ferry would be inundated, and fish traps and weirs could be used to capture large numbers of fish as they entered and exited ephemeral sloughs and marshy areas. Ktunaxa bands also constructed traps near the mouths of many of the Kootenai's tributaries to trap fish as they migrated up and down the region's waterways.

For the lower Ktunaxa bands, fishing was frequently a significant communal event that involved most of the village and sometimes members invited from bands

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<sup>31</sup> Claude Schaeffer, "The Subsistence Quest of the Kutenai: A Study of the Interaction of Culture and Environment," Phd Diss. (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, 1940), 31.

<sup>32</sup> Schaeffer, "Subsistence Quest," 31.

upriver.<sup>33</sup> A fishing chief, who had acquired the title through years of demonstrated proficiency at fishing-related tasks, organized the building and operation of the weirs and oversaw the distribution of the yields. When the fishing chief returned with canoes filled with that day's catch, he filled his own basket as a measure and dispersed equal amounts to each of the lodges in the camp. Everyone who participated in the event and every member of the band received an equal share of the bounty.

Unique to the Kootenai River but of relatively minor importance as a dietary resource, the Kootenai River white sturgeon was also occasionally pursued by the Ktunaxa. Restricted to a small section of the lower river by natural barriers, sturgeon can live to be more than a hundred years old and weigh several hundred pounds. Catching one of these fish was a difficult and individual task that served as a mark of a man's fishing prowess.

While salmon served a relatively minor dietary role for the Ktunaxa compared to many neighboring tribes along other tributaries to the Columbia River, several bands partially relied on this fish. The fall salmon season required traveling north to the main channel of the Columbia because just upstream from the confluence of the Kootenai and Columbia Rivers, waterfalls block the passage of salmon any further up the Kootenai. Given the difficulty of this journey and the local abundance of other fish species, salmon as a productive food source, while pivotal in other tribes' diets, was not as important for the Ktunaxa. However, to varying degrees among the bands, salmon fishing remained a secondary source of food which drew some Ktunaxa to the north and west to the Columbia during the fall runs. Thousands of Chinook salmon, which averaged thirty

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<sup>33</sup> Turney-High, 52-53.

pounds each, would make the journey with other salmon species late each summer to the headwaters of the undammed Columbia. The bands from the present-day areas of Bonner's Ferry and Creston on the lower reaches of the river added this resource to their diet, as did some of the northernmost bands who lived near where the headwaters of the Columbia and the Kootenai nearly join. Depending on the size of the run and the availability of other foods, fishing parties from the more distant bands would make the journey as well. Though skilled at the use of fish traps and nets for use on the Kootenai, during salmon expeditions a special type of detachable, single-pronged spear head was used for bringing in large salmon from canoes.<sup>34</sup>

Given that the Kootenai region, especially the lands around today's Bonner's Ferry during the spring floods, provided a lush habitat for an extraordinary number of waterfowl, large numbers of birds figured into the Ktunaxa diet as well. According to Turney-High's informants, the upper bands valued bird meat, particularly that of cranes; however waterfowl were not available to these groups in the same numbers as they were to the Bonner's Ferry and Creston bands downriver.<sup>35</sup> For these lower bands, ducks and other birds, frequently caught during communal hunts, made up an important portion of their annual subsistence cycle.

The adjacent landscape of the Kootenai River's broad valleys and its numerous tributaries such as the Saint Mary, Fisher, and Yaak Rivers, also provided for much of the remaining subsistence needs of the Ktunaxa. The lush climate characterized by much of the Kootenai region provided for a hearty population of large mammals, an extensive

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<sup>34</sup> Schaeffer, 37-38.

<sup>35</sup> Turney-High, 41-42.

variety of food sources and a broad selection of medicinal and spiritually significant plants. With their intimate knowledge of their local environments, the individual Ktunaxa bands skillfully took advantage of the great bounty available in the region.

The Ktunaxa practices of hunting the region's large mammals, including deer, elk, moose, and even caribou in the northern regions, followed a rhythm of seasonal migration patterns through the river valleys. The lower bands engaged in extensive communal deer drives during the winter when harsh conditions forced large numbers of these animals down into the Yaak Valley and other low-elevation areas.<sup>36</sup> Similar to the communal fishing events, in these hunts meat was distributed equally to everyone in the band. As an indication of the great importance of this species to some of the lower bands, one recent archaeological study of bones left at a large, well-used Ktunaxa campsite found that approximately ninety percent of the faunal remains were from deer.<sup>37</sup>

Other Kootenai Valley mammals that figured into the Ktunaxa diet included elk, caribou, bighorn sheep, and moose. These were not hunted in the same type of large games drives that the lower Ktunaxa bands employed for deer but instead were primary brought in by individual hunters. Not only was the meat of these large mammals important to the Ktunaxa, but nearly every part of the animal was utilized in some way in the material culture of the tribe. The hides in particular were highly praised, and the

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<sup>36</sup> Turney-High, 39.

<sup>37</sup> Roll's Koocanusa study quoted in Rebecca S. Timmons, *Kootenai National Forest Prehistoric Overview*, (Libby, MT: Kootenai National Forest, 2012), Chapter 3, p. 14.

beautifully-tanned leather produced by Ktunaxa women was a source of great pride for the tribe and proved a valuable item of trade with neighboring tribes.<sup>38</sup>

In the river valleys and on the surrounding mountain slopes, the Ktunaxa gathered an enormous variety of plant life both to supplement their diet and to serve medicinal and ceremonial functions. With their extensive knowledge of the Kootenai Valley ecosystem, the Ktunaxa knew where to go at certain times of year in order to gather plants like bitterroot and camas. Serviceberries, chokecherries, huckleberries, elderberries and Oregon grape berries were all collected in large numbers. These fruits were frequently dried or added to meat to make pemmican.<sup>39</sup>

In leaner times cakes made of the hair-like tree moss common throughout the area offered another important source of sustenance.<sup>40</sup> Explorer David Thompson described these moss cakes as having “a slightly bitter taste, but acceptable to the hungry, and in hard times, of great service to the Indians. I never could relish it, it has just nourishment enough to keep a person alive.”<sup>41</sup> The Ktunaxa also consumed the outer cambium layer of the region’s trees when other food sources were limited. Many older trees scarred by this activity earlier in their life can still be found throughout the region.

Even the dwellings of the Bonner’s Ferry and Creston bands of Ktunaxa originated from the Kootenai River’s bounty. Though the upper bands that relied more heavily on the bison hunt used hide tipis almost exclusively, these lower bands used tule

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<sup>38</sup> Linderman, ix.

<sup>39</sup> Manning, 49.

<sup>40</sup> For an extensive study of Ktunaxa subsistence practice see Schaeffer, “Subsistence Quest.”

<sup>41</sup> David Thompson, *David Thompson’s Narrative*, Joseph Burr Tyrell, editor, (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1916), 388-389.

mats made from the bulrushes that grew along the river. As Turney-High explains, “[t]he standard habitation of the Lower Kutenai was the tipi with a vegetable cover for summer, and the long house for winter. These were considered complements of each other, the covers being transferred from one type of frame to the other according to season.”<sup>42</sup>

It is clear from the long list of ways in which the Ktunaxa bands utilized the river and its resources that the Kootenai River was of enormous importance to the Ktunaxa people. From being the source of so much of their subsistence and material culture to its utility in maintain tribal unity and culture, the Kootenai River was in many ways the lifeblood of the Ktunaxa people. The Ktunaxa knew that from the time of creation, this had been their homeland.

The traditional Ktunaxa lifestyle has been described as being centered on a “river economy.”<sup>43</sup> The Ktunaxa knew this land intimately and lived in a way that utilized the abundant wealth of the rich Kootenai River Valley. Like the river itself coursing through the Ktunaxa homeland, the people who lived along its banks took their place within the local ecosystem and respected the natural world around them.

### *Beyond the River*

Thus far the Ktunaxa have been presented primarily as a river-based people, and this perspective is fundamental to a full understanding of the Ktunaxa culture. However, though the Kootenai River and the surrounding environment definitely served significant subsistence and spiritual roles, the known territory of the Ktunaxa should not be viewed

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<sup>42</sup> Turney-High, 62.

<sup>43</sup> Schaeffer, “Subsistence Quest,” 47.



as restricted to an area synonymous only with the immediate environs along the Kootenai's sinuous path. Some of the most remarkable characteristics of the Ktunaxa are how widely the bands roamed away from the Kootenai River and the vast amounts of territory they knew beyond their principle homeland. Collectively, the Ktunaxa tribe maintained an intimate understanding of lands far from their traditional village sites. Indeed, the tribe's relationship with their surrounding landscape is perhaps best viewed as one comprised of concentric rings of knowledge firmly centered on the Kootenai Valley while encompassing, to varying degrees of importance, an enormous territory hundreds of miles in every direction.

An argument can be made that there were never powerful subsistence needs motivating the Ktunaxa to leave the Kootenai River region in search of other game. The lush Kootenai landscape surely provided the tribe with its necessary resources, and there is no evidence suggesting that the area was ever overpopulated. The bountiful aquatic resources previously mentioned along with the vast numbers of large mammals that populated the region surely must have provided sufficient sustenance for tribe. Estimates of pre-contact population vary, but even if a high estimate of 10,000 is correct, the Ktunaxa's impact on a wet and mild landscape of approximately seven million acres could never have been great.<sup>44</sup>

The Kootenai River Valley is fairly isolating, a reason frequently given by anthropologists in order to explain some of the unique Ktunaxa characteristics such as their singular language which has no close linguistic relations. Mountains border the region on all sides, and travel through the densely forested landscape was difficult even

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<sup>44</sup> The 10,000 number comes from Kootenai Culture Committee, xiii. Turney-High gives an estimate of approximately 5,000 Ktunaxa prior to contact in "Ethnography of the Kutenai," 122.

after the arrival of the horse. The meandering Kootenai River is not a shortcut to anywhere else. Even today, the region remains fairly marginal, still largely circumvented by major transportation corridors. Though Ktunaxa had many Salish-speaking neighbors on the west side of the Rocky Mountains, except for occasional visits the Kootenai River Valley was almost exclusively the domain of the Ktunaxa tribe.

However, despite all of the difficulties involved and the relatively little necessity of leaving their riverine environment, the Ktunaxa traveled extensively and possessed remarkable knowledge of the world around them. As author Olga Johnson has described them, “[...] the Kutenai Indians knew the smell of sagebrush as keenly as they knew the smell of pine and alpine fir.”<sup>45</sup> The great skill of the Ktunaxa during their bison hunts to the east of the Rockies might have led outside observers to believe that they were a Plains tribe instead.

These seasonal bison hunting expeditions provide one remarkable example of the wide-ranging movements of tribe. These hunts occupied an especially important place in the subsistence cycle of the Ktunaxa bands of the upper Kootenai Valley. They provided the bands not only with large amounts of meat but also with heavy hides for tipis and other leather goods. According to their oral history, Ktunaxa bands participated in these extraordinary hunting adventures even in days before the introduction of horses to the tribe.<sup>46</sup> Several times each year, large Ktunaxa hunting parties comprised of warriors and their families would cross the Continental Divide and venture onto the Plains in search of these mighty creatures. Like their downstream neighbors during the winter deer hunt, the

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<sup>45</sup> Olga Johnson, *Flathead and Kootenay: The Rivers, the Tribes and the Region's Traders*, (Glendale, CA: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1969), 15).

<sup>46</sup> Schaeffer, “Subsistence Quest,” 24.

upper Ktunaxa bands also invited their kinsmen to join them as well. During these weeks-long expeditions, which often involved brutal winter journeys across the mountains, warriors would scour the windswept foothills and the river valleys that stretched far to the east for signs of bison herds. Hunting took place on horseback, and the bison's tough hides and dangerous horns called for great skill from the warriors. Though accomplished in mountain travel and the pursuit of game in dense forests, the Ktunaxa were just as successful on the Alberta and eastern Montana plains. Thousands of pounds of meat would be carried back across the passes after a particularly prosperous hunt.<sup>47</sup>

These extensive bison hunting expeditions also presented many challenges for the upriver bands who commonly participated in them. The principle threat to the tribe's welfare was the presence of several Plains tribes to the east with whom the Ktunaxa and their Salish neighbors remained in almost constant conflict for generations. The primary enemies the Ktunaxa had to face when crossing the Rocky Mountains were the fierce bands of the Blackfeet Confederacy. The Ktunaxa hunting parties had the weaponry and skills to defend themselves against enemy raids, and the presence of women and children attests to the fact that these excursions were not war parties. However, the dangers posed by the Blackfeet and other groups remained very real, and coupled with long distances, harsh weather, and the dangerous game sought, the bison hunts were far from simple affairs.

Descriptions of the great enmity that existed between the Ktunaxa and the Blackfeet are included in the journals of many of the early fur traders and missionaries

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<sup>47</sup> An excellent discussion of the Ktunaxa bison hunt is offered in Brian Reeves, *Our Mountains are our Pillows: An Ethnographic Overview of Glacier National Park* (West Glacier, MT: Glacier National Park, 2001) vi-vii.

who came to the region. One particularly harrowing account is offered by a government official named William T. Hamilton who in the 1850s became caught in a running battle between the Ktunaxa and the Blackfeet along the east side of today's Glacier National Park.<sup>48</sup> Despite being from such a forested and mountainous homeland, the Ktunaxa bands that Hamilton, David Thompson and others described display great skill in these battles within the traditional homeland of the powerful Plains tribe. Groups of Blackfeet warriors are also known to have crossed the mountains themselves in order to raid Ktunaxa villages.

Inter-tribal relationships between Ktunaxa bands and their many other neighbors on both sides of the Continental Divide were rarely as hostile as with the Blackfeet. Relatively peaceful interactions took place between the Ktunaxa and Salish-speaking tribes such as the Bitterroot Salish, Pend d'Oreille, and Kalispell. These relationships further demonstrate the ambiguous and undefined nature of tribal boundaries and the expansiveness of the landscape collectively known to the Ktunaxa. Through the significant trade that developed and the important alliances Ktunaxa bands fostered with these neighbors to aid each other during the bison hunt, the Ktunaxa greatly extended the territory through which they could safely travel.

Small groups of Ktunaxa warriors and occasionally even entire bands would make extensive treks to trade and spend time with other tribes in the Columbia Basin. For the most part, relations with their Salish-speaking neighbors were cordial and mutually beneficial. Groups might camp together for weeks, and several of the early Euro-Americans in the Inland Northwest noted the presence of Salish and Ktunaxa bands

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<sup>48</sup> William T. Hamilton, "A Trading Expedition Among the Indians in 1858, from Fort Walla Walla to the Blackfoot Country and Return." *Contributions to the Historical Society of Montana*, Vol. 3 (1900), 33-123.

together in the same camps.<sup>49</sup> The relative lack of hostility between these groups also played a significant role in the later decision by the United States government to place the Bitterroot Salish, Pend d'Oreille, and Ktunaxa bands together on the same reservation south of Flathead Lake in Montana.

The unique nature of the Ktunaxa language appears not to have hindered trade, as those who conducted the negotiations were masters of a regional sign language. Foodstuffs and items of material culture were traded in artful ceremonies in which the parties involved showed mutual respect. The stunning white tanned hides produced by the Ktunaxa proved to hold significant trade value to the tribe as they were highly prized by many of their neighbors.<sup>50</sup>

Ktunaxa traders ranged such long distances that in the early 1800s a few Ktunaxa were reportedly seen by Canadian fur traders near the mouth of the Columbia, hundreds of miles to the west of their homeland.<sup>51</sup> While this was likely not a common occurrence it demonstrates the wide distances the Ktunaxa were willing to travel and the great extent of their knowledge of the wider world around them. It also reveals their remarkable ability to negotiate travel without conflict through the traditional homelands of the many tribes that lived along the banks of the Columbia River.

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<sup>49</sup> David Thompson, *David Thompson's Narrative*, Joseph Burr Tyrell, ed. (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1916), 417, 420.

<sup>50</sup> Hudson's Bay Company records note that the trade of Ktunaxa hides to other tribes in the region proved of great value to the firm when they entered the region. David Chance, "Influences of the Hudson's Bay Company on the Native Cultures of the Colville District," Northwest Anthropological Research Notes 2, (Moscow, ID: University of Idaho, 1973), 61.

<sup>51</sup> Thompson, 512-512. This is a particularly interesting account because Thompson describes meeting a Ktunaxa who had declared herself to be a man, become a "prophetess" and taken for herself a wife.

Joining into large groups could be particularly useful during the dangerous bison hunt. Bands of Ktunaxa frequently came together to hunt or to accompany their Salish-speaking allies to the Plains for mutual protection. Parties of hundreds of Bitterroot Salish and Ktunaxa warriors traveling across the mountains with their families and large numbers of horses must have made a particularly impressive sight. During these weeks-long journeys close friendships and even the occasional inter-tribal marriage also developed.<sup>52</sup>

Just as the Ktunaxa journeyed beyond the Kootenai River Valley, other groups came to the Ktunaxa homeland as well. The tribe's Salish-speaking allies would frequently join Ktunaxa bands for ceremonies and subsistence-related activities along the shores of the Kootenai. On the other hand, parties of Blackfoot warriors were themselves more than willing to cross the Continental Divide in order to raid Ktunaxa encampments.<sup>53</sup>

The great distances traveled by the Ktunaxa and the important role played by ecosystems far-removed from the traditional Ktunaxa homeland is also revealed in the tribe's place naming practices. In his comprehensive ethnographic overview of Glacier National Park, Brian Reeves notes the existence of Ktunaxa place names for many locations throughout the park, including mountains and rivers on the east side of the

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<sup>52</sup> As difficult as it must have been for the parties involved due to the near constant hostilities between tribes, Chamberlain also notes occurrences of intermarriage between Ktunaxa and Blackfoot. Alexander F. Chamberlain, "The Kootenay Indians," Annual Archaeological Report Ontario, no. 12. (Toronto, Ontario: Ontario Provincial Government, 1905), 179.

<sup>53</sup> British traders William Hamilton and Alex McKay described an instance of this as late as the 1850s. Donald Spitzer, *Waters of Wealth: the Story of the Kootenai River and Libby Dam*, (Boulder, Colorado: Pruett Publishing Co., 1979), 43-44.

Continental Divide.<sup>54</sup> The “Traditional Territory of the Ktunaxa Nation” map created by the Ktunaxa Nation Council included earlier in this chapter also includes place names for several locations distant from present reservations.<sup>55</sup>

Whether navigating the turbulent waters of the Kootenai River during the spring or chasing bison across the frozen plains in the winter, the Ktunaxa people demonstrated an extraordinary talent in successfully negotiating the landscape. In trading and maintaining alliances with their neighbors, the tribe displayed similarly well-honed negotiation and relationship-building skills. The Ktunaxa seemed at home even hundreds of miles away from the Kootenai Valley. Even though this vast area beyond the tribe’s isolated river valley was not the Ktunaxa homeland, it was a landscape of equal importance to the Ktunaxa lifestyle.

The Ktunaxa relationship with the landscape and their understanding of boundaries was vastly intricate. Later Euro-American cartographers could not possibly have grasped this complexity when they attempted to place tribes such as the Ktunaxa in defined and bounded areas on their maps. While the Ktunaxa bands surely had an environment they called home, they also had a vast knowledge and understanding of relatively distant lands. Though the Kootenai landscape could have proven isolating, these natural barriers were easily overcome by the tribe, and defining the Ktunaxa relationship with the landscape and tribal ideas of boundaries is no simple task.

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<sup>54</sup> Brian Reeves, *Our Mountains are our Pillows: An Ethnographic Overview of Glacier National Park* (West Glacier, MT: Glacier National Park, 2001).

<sup>55</sup> Ktunaxa Nation Council, “Traditional Territory of the Ktunaxa Nation.”

## *Boundaries*

Given the complexity of the traditional Ktunaxa way of life it is easy to understand why anthropologists have struggled in their attempts to situate the tribe within a pre-established typology. Nevertheless, a number of conclusions can be drawn from this broad overview of the tribe. Of particular significance are the tribe's relations to the land and how the Ktunaxa bands conceived of the idea of borders. It appears that the Ktunaxa possessed a complex understanding of boundaries which drew on an appreciation of several different layers of identity, power, and knowledge.

As the close relationships among individual Ktunaxa bands during bison and salmon expeditions suggest, boundaries between each group remained somewhat indiscrete. While bands were identified by their various winter residences, much movement occurred throughout the year. Individuals, families, and entire bands would travel and stay with neighboring groups in order to trade, visit relatives, communally gather resources, arrange marriages, and celebrate ceremonial events.<sup>56</sup>

Similarly, boundaries between the Ktunaxa bands and neighboring tribes remained relatively undefined, and the Kootenai River Valley served as the most important portion of the landscape for the Ktunaxa. When the tribe's Salish-speaking allies and even their Blackfeet enemies entered the valley, there must have been some recognition that they had entered the Ktunaxa homeland. Where was this boundary? It certainly was not a physical line on the landscape. Was it perhaps different for a group of Bitterroot Salish as opposed to a Blackfeet war party?

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<sup>56</sup> Turney-High offers a helpful discussion of social practices, 122-161.



When the Ktunaxa crossed the Rocky Mountains onto the Great Plains they must have felt justified in being there to fulfill their subsistence needs. Even in this homeland of their enemies, the Ktunaxa surely experienced a sense of Ktunaxa belonging. Fully aware of the dangers posed by the Blackfeet and other Plains tribes, the Ktunaxa hunting parties who made their way through the mountain passes proceeded with caution. Nevertheless, this region was part of the tribe's usable landscape, filled with places known for good hunting, and recognized because of past significant events.

The Ktunaxa relationship with the natural world they inhabited can perhaps be best understood as composed of multiple concentric rings of knowledge. While the tribe spent much of its time and derived much of its knowledge from their Kootenai homeland, other far-removed areas also served important material and spiritual functions. It seems that only the density of places of significant meaning appears to have decreased the further one traveled from the center of the Ktunaxa homeland.

It appears most accurate to describe the Ktunaxa understanding of boundaries and property ownership as based on a spectrum of familiarity and tolerance. The closer to the riverine heartland of the Ktunaxa's known territory, the greater the understanding that this was home. Though friendly tribes may have been allowed to enter the valley, as they traveled deeper into the Ktunaxa homeland a greater respect had to be accorded to the wishes of the Ktunaxa bands in order to avoid insult.

To gain a better appreciation of the Ktunaxa understanding of landscape and boundaries it is helpful to draw on the work of two theorists who have studied the meaning of the natural world for native peoples. Though neither of these authors has specifically studied the Ktunaxa, their findings can still guide a similar discussion about

the Kootenai River people. Moreover, many of their findings appear amply suited for a discussion of the Ktunaxa; not only is this tribe's situation analogous to those examined in Basso and Abram's studies, but these scholars' findings are particularly applicable when analyzing the Ktunaxa due to the tribe's prolonged relative isolation from Euro-American influences and the central importance of the Kootenai River for their culture.

Keith Basso offers substantial insight into the powerful roles a landscape imbued with place names, tribal traditions, and spiritual stories can play for indigenous peoples in his study of the Western Apache, *Wisdom Sits in Places*.<sup>57</sup> Through his work in mapping a portion of the tribe's homeland with traditional Western Apache place names, Basso discovers among his informants a remarkable understanding of place and environment. In order to fully comprehend a native culture and the way a people such as the Western Apache view the world around them, Basso argues that it is essential to understand how these cultures relate to individual components of the landscape.

For the Western Apache, the landscape serves as more than simply a place imbued with nostalgia and history or an area they have become comfortable with after years of experience. Instead, their understanding of the land has intimate ties to religion, morality, and identity. Each significant geographic place or geological feature might represent a historical and moral lesson. Basso discovers that the natural world serves as a physical representation of the tribe's history. It is more important for tribal members to know *where* something happened than when.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Basso's argument is well-summarized in the final chapter of *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 105-150.

<sup>58</sup> Basso, 31.

The very name of a place evokes a portion of the tribe's history or conjures a moral lesson. Even a feature far-removed from regular use might have a place name and story attached to it. For the Western Apache, the landscape itself and the stories it holds constantly assist in maintaining cultural identity. When the author inquired about the concept of tribal wisdom, an informant explained one of the most profound lessons of the text, that "[w]isdom sits in places. It's like water that never dries up. You need to drink water to stay alive, don't you? Well, you also need to drink from places."<sup>59</sup>

While *Wisdom Sits in Places* engages exclusively with the Western Apache, Keith Basso does suggest that much of what he finds is true for many Native American tribes. In looking at the modern literature produced by native authors, Basso encounters convincing evidence which suggests that "general similarities do exist" from tribe to tribe.<sup>60</sup> An understanding of the Kootenai River and its adjacent environment was surely as integral to traditional Ktunaxa culture in pre-contact times as eastern Arizona remains to the Western Apache today.

It is clear from the intimate relationship the Ktunaxa maintained with the Kootenai River landscape that the natural world held much more meaning for the Ktunaxa people than simply as an arbitrary collection of geographical locations. Though this present study of the Ktunaxa people deliberately avoids inclusion of spiritual practices, sensitive cultural information which should not be discussed by tribal outsiders, it is also apparent in the work of anthropologists Turney-High and Schaeffer that the natural environment served very important spiritual roles for the tribe. The vast landscape

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<sup>59</sup> Basso, 127.

<sup>60</sup> Basso, 63.

frequented by the individual Ktunaxa bands certainly served similar roles for these people as Basso found with the Western Apache; the Kootenai River Valley helped create a common tribal identity, maintain tribal history and teach moral lessons.

Intricately intertwined with these spiritual and cultural relationships with the land was the role played by the natural world in shaping what it meant to be Ktunaxa. According to geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, much of an individual's personal or social identity is developed through one's experience with the surrounding world, in which the abstract and nebulous *space* around the self becomes a meaningful *place*.<sup>61</sup> Space is unbounded and free, but also mysterious and abstract. Eventually, through the acquisition of experience, enough knowledge of a space may be gained so that it becomes a significant place; in other words, places have history. Places are well-known and concrete when compared to space. Not only did a Ktunaxa individual's experience of the Kootenai River Valley help transform the area into a significant *place* or homeland, but all of the occasions when tribal members participated in spiritual events or listened to tribal histories associated with the area's landscape reinforced this development.

Environmental philosopher David Abram further explores the meaning of landscape and boundaries for indigenous peoples in his text *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World*.<sup>62</sup> By examining non-Western cultures Abram finds a strong connection between the people and their larger environment which constitutes a dynamic relationship among humans and natural

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<sup>61</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 6.

<sup>62</sup> David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1996).

objects, places, plants and animals. However, at some point in history this reciprocal engagement with what he terms the “more-than-human world” was severed, and much of his text searches for the reasons for this separation.

For centuries, the intimate human relationship with the natural world served an important role in the development of human culture and knowledge. Drawing on many of Keith Basso’s concepts while resonating with Yi-Fu Tuan’s ideas of space and place, Abram claims that the earth was once comprised of “experiential space” or *places* which were imbued with the knowledge that helped maintain human culture.<sup>63</sup> The natural world was not inanimate but instead filled with knowledge systems essential for human understanding of themselves and of the broader world.

According to Abram, with the advent of an “alphabetized intellect” reliant upon discursive writing, humans transferred their knowledge base from the signifying landscape to written symbols on paper. Now, humans could create absolute sources of knowledge independent of the natural world, such as religious texts and maps to define their place on earth.<sup>64</sup> The voices that once occupied the more-than-human world are now silenced, and “the felt primacy of place is forgotten, superseded by a new, abstract notion of “space” as a homogeneous and placeless void.”<sup>65</sup>

As described above, for the Ktunaxa bands as with other non-Western peoples, the more-than-human world served a significant role in tribal culture. The bands’ unrivaled knowledge of the Kootenai landscape functioned in a similar way to the book-

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<sup>63</sup> Abram, 182, 190.

<sup>64</sup> Abram, 92.

<sup>65</sup> Abram, 184.

based knowledge of the Euro-Americans who later entered the region. In many ways, the Ktunaxa reciprocity with the landscape facilitated a way of life which harmonized almost perfectly with their homeland. It was a lifestyle that functioned beautifully for centuries, but one that faced very real threats from the eventual introduction of the alphabetized intellect.

On the surface the dichotomy introduced by Basso and Abram appears discordant. How can a people who place so much value on an understanding of their own homeland also have little understanding of boundaries and property ownership? Yet, this is perhaps the most significant point. Only people who have already severed their relationship with the more-than-human world would ask this question or could conceive of humans as masters exerting ownership over the surrounding environment.

Neither *The Spell of the Sensuous* nor *Wisdom Sits in Places* is specifically concerned with the Ktunaxa. However, as demonstrated above, many of the concepts that Abrams and Basso have elaborated are especially pertinent to a discussion of the tribe. These were a people who maintained an extensive knowledge of their environment and who depended on that environment to help maintain their culture.

### *Conclusion*

As this brief overview of the use and meaning of land for the Ktunaxa suggests, the tribe possessed a powerful understanding of their homeland. The Kootenai River Valley was virtually synonymous with its Ktunaxa residents in pre-contact times. The tribe knew that it was specifically placed in this generous landscape by their creator, and

through generations of life along its banks they acquired a keen and intimate knowledge of the river and the surrounding landscape.

The Kootenai River clearly played a central role in defining the Ktunaxa homeland. As the unique subsistence approaches of the seven bands suggest, each was well adapted to its particular village sites along the course of the river. The Ktunaxa could have flourished in this vast seven million-acre landscape in nearly complete isolation thanks to their extensive understanding of the Kootenai's enormous bounty. Coupled with the spiritual, and as Keith Basso suggests, the historical, moral and unifying characteristics of the landscape, the Kootenai River environment was closely interwoven with the Ktunaxa people who inhabited it.

However, as the frequent journeys far away from the river and the complex web of inter-band and intertribal relationships suggest, this was not a landscape divided by impenetrable boundaries or separated into distinct parcels of property. The isolating tendencies of the local environment did little to restrict Ktunaxa movement. Though an actual subsistence need may not have existed, Ktunaxa bands and individuals did travel and could be found far out on the Great Plains to the east and all the way down to the mouth of the Columbia to the west. Whether called by a desire to trade, to increase the variety of available materials and foodstuffs, or to engage their enemies in battle, or perhaps compelled for spiritual reasons, the Ktunaxa commanded a vast knowledge of an extensive landscape.

A model based on concentric rings of knowledge offers the best way to understand the Ktunaxa relationship with the world around them. Like the river at the center of Ktunaxa life, the tribe held a fluid and dynamic appreciation of their territory

which is difficult to reduce into linear terms. The Ktunaxa bands possessed such skills and knowledge of the environment which allowed them to thrive on both sides of the Rockies and far down the Columbia. Yet there was a constant understanding that home remained centered on the Kootenai. The land immediately surrounding the Kootenai River, the center of this system of concentric circles, held the most importance in the maintenance of Ktunaxa culture.

For generations this understanding of the Kootenai River Valley and of the dynamics of the more-than-human world dominated Ktunaxa way of life. The land became intimately connected to Ktunaxa identity by acquiring meaning as an experienced *place*, or homeland, which developed over the course of hundreds of years of history, traditions and spiritual practices that respected the surrounding landscape. However, as new forces entered the tribe's traditional territory in the early 1800s, the Ktunaxa relationship with the landscape began to face enormous challenges. The fur traders and missionaries who made their way into the Kootenai River region not only brought world markets and a new religion to the Ktunaxa, they also carried with them distinct worldviews and concepts regarding land use and boundaries. Though early relations with Euro-American outsiders were relatively peaceful, these new understandings of the more-than-human environment brought about a gradual but profound transformation in Ktunaxa cultural identity.



## CHAPTER 3

### A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

“Although the story of the invasion of the Americas was not new, it assumed many forms. Some were clean and swift, like a knife. Others were subtle, even exquisite, in the masking of their mode of destruction.”

- Jacqueline Peterson and Laura Peers<sup>66</sup>

After centuries of sharing the Kootenai River region only with other Ktunaxa bands and occasional visitors from the neighboring Bitterroot Salish, Pend d'Oreille, and Blackfoot tribes, a radically different group of travelers entered the valley at the turn of the nineteenth century. These outsiders brought with them new tools such as firearms and metal kettles which significantly changed the Ktunaxa way of life. They also carried with them a set of novel ideas about spirituality and the natural world that ultimately came to have a profound effect on the tribe's interaction with the Kootenai River Valley landscape.

Looking to expand their already immense trading empire, the Canadian-based North West Company first succeeded in sending parties of traders west across the treacherous Canadian Rockies in order to establish a trading relationship with the bands of the Ktunaxa tribe in 1807. These company agents found in the Ktunaxa and their neighbors willing trading partners, and a cordial and mutually-beneficial relationship developed between these tribes and the fur traders. The success of these early transactions led the North West Company and its successor in the region, the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), to eventually build and maintain several trading posts throughout Ktunaxa territory over the next seventy years.

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<sup>66</sup> Jacqueline Peterson and Laura Peers, *Sacred Encounters: Father De Smet and the Indians of the Rocky Mountain West* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 22.

Not only did these fur traders introduce new types of commercial goods into the region, but they also introduced ideas that eventually transformed the Ktunaxa relationship with the Kootenai Valley and the surrounding environment. They carried with them European concepts of boundaries and property rights that differed greatly from the traditional Ktunaxa understanding of these concepts. Even if these early explorers and traders may have operated in many ways within pre-contact models of trade and land-use, the maps they drew and way they viewed the environment posed serious challenges to the Ktunaxa way of life.

The foreign worldview first introduced by the fur traders was further instilled by the missionaries who made their way into the Ktunaxa homeland over the next few decades. When Jesuit priests first entered the region in the early 1840s, they found the Ktunaxa and their Salish-speaking neighbors just as welcoming as the fur traders had found them decades before. However, the ultimate consequences of the great hospitality these tribes showed the missionaries were far from benevolent. In the course of claiming the land for God, the “black robes,” as they were called by native tribes, further perpetuated a European-based understanding of the natural world which required imposing new limits and boundaries on the land.

This chapter analyzes the early years of interaction between the Ktunaxa and Euro-Americans. The first section focuses on the biographies of two men who led European expansion into the Ktunaxa homeland: the intrepid explorer, expert trader and skilled mapmaker David Thompson, and the devoted Jesuit missionary Father Pierre-Jean De Smet. After painting a portrait of the immediate effects these new entrants and their associates had on the Ktunaxa people, the discussion turns to the broader implications of

the new understanding of the world these early travelers brought to the region that ultimately brought about a much more radical transformation in the Ktunaxa way of life.

### *Voyageurs*

Fur traders dominated the Euro-American presence in the upper reaches of the Columbia River Basin for nearly fifty years. The early relations between these Canadian voyageurs and the native peoples west of the Rocky Mountains occurred on relatively cordial terms in which the tribes were fully aware of the benefits they received from these transactions. However, with the beneficial material goods that tribes such as the Ktunaxa acquired from the outsiders came the catalysts for a sweeping transformation in the traditional lifestyles of the region's population.

The rival Canadian fur trading firms, the North West and Hudson's Bay Companies, had long dreamed of crossing the Rocky Mountains and opening trade with the tribes inhabiting the upper reaches of the Columbia River Basin. They knew that the region teemed with the furbearing mammals they desired, and early meetings with individuals from the tribes of the Plateau promised friendly relations. However, two great obstacles long delayed expeditions across the mountains: the geographical challenges of carrying out successful trade across the rugged Rockies hundreds of miles away from their nearest sources of provisions, and the dangers posed by the tribes of the western Plains who demonstrated hostility towards traders interacting with their enemies. Ultimately, through the efforts of a number of skilled and dedicated adventurers, the companies did succeed, forever changing the geographical and social landscapes of the interior Northwest.

Fur traders first encountered the Ktunaxa in the late 1700s along the east slope of the Rocky Mountains. Very small groups of Ktunaxa traveled to Rocky Mountain House and other North West and Hudson's Bay Company posts on the east side.<sup>67</sup> These trading parties faced great difficulties on their long trips, as the Blackfeet, who had benefitted from trade with the Canadians for years, were determined to prevent the Ktunaxa from gaining the same access to firearms. Still, the people who called the west slope of the Rocky Mountains home realized that they needed access to these traders if they were to continue to compete on an equal footing with their Plains neighbors.

The deep animosity between the bands of the Ktunaxa and the Blackfeet Confederacy had existed for generations. As early fur trader Ross Cox remarked, bison were "the cause of all their [Ktunaxa] misfortunes."<sup>68</sup> Each hunting expedition east of the Continental Divide brought the Ktunaxa into the traditional Blackfeet homeland. In a near constant cycle of conflict, Ktunaxa and Blackfeet warriors tested each other in frequent battles and nighttime raids. The few practical passages through the mountains posed particular challenges for the Ktunaxa and their allies.<sup>69</sup> Although they were long capable of standing their own ground against the Blackfeet, the Ktunaxa suffered greatly from the late eighteenth-century introduction of firearms into the hands of their enemies. For several decades, the Blackfeet and their Plains allies monopolized access to the

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<sup>67</sup> David Thompson describes the great courage displayed in crossing the Rockies and facing their Blackfeet enemies by the first group of Ktunaxa he encountered in 1800. David Thompson, *David Thompson: Travels in Western North America, 1784-1812*, Victor Hopwood ed. (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1971) 219-220.

<sup>68</sup> Ross Cox, *The Columbia River*, Edgar Stewart ed. (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), 264.

<sup>69</sup> For a discussion of archaeological sites that demonstrate these conflicts, see Brian Reeves, *Our Mountains are our Pillows: An Ethnographic Overview of Glacier National Park* (West Glacier, MT: Glacier National Park, 2001).

traders, allegedly promising to one Hudson's Bay factor at Fort Edmonton, "[i]f they again meet with a white Man going to supply their Enemies, they would not only plunder & kill him, but that they would make dry Meat of his body."<sup>70</sup>

Even with such dangers, opening a commercial relationship with the Ktunaxa and their neighbors to the west of the Rockies promised such great profits for the Canadian trading companies that they eventually outfitted expeditions into the Kootenai River Valley. The first may have occurred in the winter of 1800-1801 when the North West Company sent two voyageurs, La Gassi and Le Blanc, to winter with the upper bands of Ktunaxa.<sup>71</sup> Little is known about this expedition, but if successful, they may have been the first Euro-Americans to catch a glimpse of the Kootenai River and the source of the Columbia.

The name now synonymous with the fur trade of the upper Columbia River Basin is that of North West Company trader and explorer David Thompson. Over the course of twenty-eight years, first with the Hudson's Bay Company and then with its primary competitor, Thompson traveled over 55,000 miles of the Canadian interior and explored the full course of the Kootenai and Columbia Rivers, becoming the first Euro-American to meet many of the Columbia Basin tribes. He is not only noted as a skilled trader who maintained amiable relations with tribes throughout a large portion of present-day Canada and the Pacific Northwest, but he is also remembered as one of the most brilliant cartographers of his day, producing remarkably accurate maps of the lands he explored.

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<sup>70</sup> James Bird, 60/a/9, Hudson's Bay Company Archives, quoted in Reeves, 11.

<sup>71</sup> Thompson, *Travels*, 221.

Taken from a school for poor boys in London, Thompson arrived at Churchill Factory on Hudson Bay to clerk for the HBC when he was only fourteen. Here he learned the basic skills required of the northwest fur trade but quickly grew disillusioned with his employer. Particularly galling to the young David Thompson was the failure of the Company to fully utilize the skills he had developed as a geographer.<sup>72</sup> In 1797, after completing his apprenticeship, Thompson defected to the HBC's chief rival, the North West Company. Here he found himself encouraged to pursue his interests of surveying and exploring the interior of the continent and reached the position of full partner in the Montreal-based company in 1804.

During these early years, Thompson traveled widely west of the Great Lakes and onto the Plains. In his first season with the North West Company in 1797, he traveled 4,000 miles in ten months, including a trip in the middle of winter to the Mandan villages where he surveyed portions of the upper Missouri several years before Lewis and Clark began their own journey.<sup>73</sup> During his tenure with the North West Company, Thompson traded with tribes throughout the region and helped to establish a successful trading relationship with the bands of the Blackfoot Confederacy in present-day Alberta.

Like other Canadian traders of the era, David Thompson operated his business within the framework of a middle-ground among French, English, and native influences. While most of the leading traders came from English backgrounds, many of the Montreal-based company's employees, known as voyageurs, were of French descent. In the isolated world in which these men worked, the native peoples they traded with

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<sup>72</sup> Thompson, *Travels*, 12.

<sup>73</sup> D'Arcy Jenish, *Epic Wanderer: David Thompson and the Mapping of the Canadian West*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 88.

remained a dominant presence. Especially in the far reaches of their trading territory, the North West Company recognized the necessity of operating within traditional tribal trading structures and treating their native counterparts with respect.

Thompson himself negotiated this complex world with great skill. He opened trade with many tribes that had never before come in contact with Euro-Americans. Thompson also maintained prolonged amiable relations with tribes such as the Blackfeet, frequently considered hostile to outsiders by his contemporaries, and built long-lasting friendships with important native people such as the Blackfeet war chief, Kootenae Appee.<sup>74</sup> These close personal relationships came to his rescue innumerable times during his years in the Canadian interior. Also of crucial importance to his success as a trader was his Métis wife, Charlotte, who traveled with him on many of his journeys. Though seldom mentioned in his journals, Charlotte and their children not only provided Thompson with company, but their presence assuredly helped ease tensions when encountering peoples who had reason to be wary of outsiders.

While individual traders like La Gassi and Le Blanc may have made it across the Continental Divide earlier, the first large expedition to establish permanent posts in the Ktunaxa homeland occurred in 1807. After a number of failed attempts to reach the tribe, Thompson, his wife and their three young children, along with seven assistants and three pack horses, successfully crossed Howse Pass through the Canadian Rockies and arrived on banks the Columbia, which Thompson, unaware of its meandering course, mistakenly

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<sup>74</sup> Thompson, *Travels*, 237-238.

called the Kootenay River.<sup>75</sup> Traveling south they reached the river's headwaters where they built a small post for the winter. Here Thompson, through a combination of the construction of a defensible fort and his skill at negotiation, saved the small party from two expeditions of Blackfoot warriors sent to prevent them from opening trade with the Ktunaxa.

The next spring the explorer made the short journey to the source of what eventually became known as the Kootenai River, which he named after the head of the North West Co., William McGillivray. He liked what he saw and observed that "the River in general has a very smooth easy current with a sufficient depth of water, and where we are camped the points are of fine meadow and the first ground I have seen that has sufficient moisture to farm."<sup>76</sup> After traveling down the "McGillivray" to the flooded countryside around modern-day Bonner's Ferry, Thompson returned to his Kootenay House from which he made a quick journey back across the mountains to deliver the company's first load of furs from west of the Rocky Mountains.

Thompson traveled widely throughout the region on this and subsequent trips, exploring the Kootenai, Clark Fork, and upper Columbia Rivers and establishing a trading relationship with the tribes of the inland Northwest. The North West Co., under Thompson's direction, constructed a number of small posts in the area, including the aforementioned Kootenay House, Fort Kootenay, Kullyspell House, and later Saleesh

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<sup>75</sup> Donald E. Spitzer, *Waters of Wealth: The Story of the Kootenai River and Libby Dam*, (Boulder, Colorado: Pruett Publishing Co., 1979), 24-25.

<sup>76</sup> Spitzer, 27.



House.<sup>77</sup> None of these were large establishments and usually only a trader and one or two assistants managed them on a seasonal basis.

The Hudson's Bay Company soon followed their rivals, sending trader Joseph Howse for a single season in 1810-1811, but it could not compete in the Kootenai Valley with the already firmly-established North West Company traders until it finally absorbed its competitor in 1821. American fur buyers also had little success in the inland Northwest until the United States and British governments settled the border in 1846, forcing the HBC out of the region.<sup>78</sup> However for nearly fifty years before the establishment of the international border, the Canadian traders dominated the upper Columbia basin fur trade as well as the Euro-American interaction with the tribes who called this land home.

Upon their arrival in the area, the traders found in the Ktunaxa and their neighbors eager trading partners. Thompson describes the warm reception he received from the native peoples he met throughout his journals. They provided him and his men with food (though he describes the Ktunaxa moss cakes as less than relishing), horses and canoes for travel, and guides to lead them through the rugged country, and the tribe generally treated the outsiders with an extraordinary level of hospitality.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Thompson, *Narrative*, 375-560.

<sup>78</sup> For a good discussion of the fur trade in the region and its effects see David Chance, "Influences of the Hudson's Bay Company on the Native Cultures of the Colville District," Northwest Anthropological Research Notes 2 (Moscow, ID: University of Idaho, 1973).

<sup>79</sup> On the verge of starvation near Kootenai Falls, Thompson's men were saved when they met a group of Ktunaxa, probably from the Bonner's Ferry band, who provided them with moss cakes which Thompson described in a less-than-favorable light: "I never could relish it, it has just nourishment enough to keep a person alive." Thompson, *Narrative*, 388-389.

Early trading between the Ktunaxa and fur traders took place on relatively cordial terms and brought mutual benefits to both parties. As trader Ross Cox noted, the Ktunaxa

“appear to be perfectly aware that beaver was the only object that induced us to visit their country; and they accordingly exerted themselves to procure it, not, as some of them candidly declared, for our purposes, but for the purpose of obtaining fire-arms, spears &c., to enable them to meet their old enemies the Black-feet on more equal terms.”<sup>80</sup>

The Ktunaxa and their neighbors, with extensive experience in the art of trade, knew they could benefit from the presence of the Canadians and displayed shrewdness and skill in the bargaining process.

Traders frequently commented on their amiable dealings with the Ktunaxa and Salish-speaking tribes on the west side of the Rockies, and an intensive system of exchange soon developed in which pelts and the beautifully-tanned deer hides of the Ktunaxa bought weapons, blankets and kettles. The Ktunaxa hides had long been desired by neighboring tribes before the appearance of the Euro-Americans, and the Canadians quickly appreciated this fact. Assuming the roles of middle-men in this historic trade offered the traders great profits during the initial years. In fact, at one point the trade in Ktunaxa tanned hides proved twice as profitable for the traders as the sale of manufactured textiles and metal pans at nearby Fort Colville.<sup>81</sup>

The relationship the Canadian traders developed with the Ktunaxa bands that wintered near the southern bend of the Kootenai River is relatively characteristic of the company's overall approach to trade in the region. The posts established along the Kootenai River would be occupied each winter by a trader and perhaps a few company

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<sup>80</sup> Cox, 263.

<sup>81</sup> Chance, 61.

employees who would pack bundles of furs out to regional centers each spring. As the company expanded and then was acquired by the HBC, these district hubs changed from Rocky Mountain House during the first years of trade to Spokane House and Fort Colville on the banks of the Columbia River later on.

The trading site of most consequence within the vicinity of the southernmost bands of Ktunaxa was Fort Kootenai. Originally built along the river near modern-day Jennings, Montana by William Kittson in 1828, the post was occupied off and on until the HBC relocated it upriver to Tobacco Plains in 1846. Here it remained for a number of decades, though it had to be rebuilt across the new international border when surveyors established the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel.<sup>82</sup> The well-traveled Ktunaxa would also trade at other posts in the region such as Salish and Kullyspell Houses while visiting their allies, particularly during years when the Company failed to send traders to Fort Kootenai.

The winter occupation of the posts offered several benefits: it occurred during the coldest portion of the year when pelts were at their best and when Ktunaxa bands lived primarily along the river's banks, and due to winter limits on travel and outside activities, this time of year presented important opportunities for social interaction such as sitting around the fire, relating oral histories and trading. David Thompson and his successors in the Ktunaxa trade, including William Kittson, Edward Berland and John Linklater, found the Ktunaxa amicable and good-natured hosts as well as wise and shrewd traders. One 1840s traveler through the region noted of the Ktunaxa traders that

“[t]heir honesty is so great and so well known, that the trader leaves his storehouse entirely, the door remaining unlocked often during his absences of weeks. The Indians go in and out and help themselves to what they

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<sup>82</sup> Spitzer, 33-34.

need, and settle with the trader in his return [...] in doing business with them in this style he never lost the value of a pin.”<sup>83</sup>

Though little threat of violence endangered the Ktunaxa trade after the early years of Blackfeet aggression, the Kootenai region steadily declined in profitability for the fur companies. By 1845, traders brought only ten percent of the furs they had in the 1820s out of the region.<sup>84</sup> Always a long distance from supplies in an area that soon threatened to become territory of the United States and that was experiencing rapid depletion in the population of fur-bearing mammals, Ktunaxa trade became more marginal as mid-century approached. The relative unprofitability of trade with the Ktunaxa bands in the later years was further impelled by the near total lack of interest in the region on the part of American traders.

Though the early entry of Euro-Americans into the Ktunaxa landscape did not immediately bring major social upheaval or new conflict, the Western philosophies inherent in these outsiders’ worldview did unleash powerful forces that would eventually cause radical transformations in the traditional Ktunaxa lifestyle. With the exception of the revolution in traditional warfare patterns resulting from the introduction of firearms, the fur traders’ interests could best be served by altering Ktunaxa society as little as possible.<sup>85</sup> The North West Company and its HBC successors did not need to force their trade upon the Ktunaxa; instead, their success relied on operating within a trading system well-established among the region’s tribes. The Ktunaxa bands’ willingness to trade and

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<sup>83</sup> Father De Smet quoted in Spitzer, 21.

<sup>84</sup> Spitzer, 34.

<sup>85</sup> Chance, 134.

their great skill in collecting pelts and tanning hides proved to company leaders that any radical changes in Ktunaxa lifestyle could only hinder the region's profitability.

However, even if Thompson's North West Company and their Hudson's Bay rivals predominantly desired Ktunaxa culture to remain unaltered, the Western worldviews these outsiders carried with them eventually presented significant challenges to Ktunaxa culture and relationship with the land. The traders undoubtedly understood the world in terms of nations and boundaries, concepts they were acutely aware of in the Columbia region claimed both by the Americans and the British. Although the traders were not as devout of Christians as the missionaries who soon entered the region, they nonetheless viewed the world through the lens of Western religion.

As the Ktunaxa bands themselves recognized, the fur trade had some immediate physical impacts. It is important to note that, at least during the early years, alcohol played little role in the traders' relations with the tribe.<sup>86</sup> The presence of firearms, however, unquestionably altered the Ktunaxa's traditional lifestyles and the precarious balance between them and their native enemies. The introduction of metal kettles transformed cooking practices as well, and glass beads changed the way the Ktunaxa adorned their traditional decorative goods. However, as important as all of these changes were, they were all incorporated within Ktunaxa culture with relatively little disruption of the tribe's understanding of the world. None of these new practices threatened to radically transform the tribe's way of life.

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<sup>86</sup> According to Thompson, during his tenure with the tribes on the west side of the Rockies he did not allow a single drop of alcohol to be traded and destroyed the alcohol the Company sent with him. Thompson, *Narrative*, 396.

On the surface, the fur trade years did not appear to bring drastic social upheaval for the Ktunaxa. While some important changes appeared, the tools the tribe gained were fairly easily incorporated into the pre-contact lifestyle. However, though of little immediate threat, the lenses through which the Canadian fur traders viewed the Ktunaxa homeland as a space that could be owned and divided would eventually come to threaten the continued existence of Ktunaxa culture.

### *Missionaries*

While David Thompson and his associates may have recognized the benefit of maintaining traditional native cultures, they cleared the way for other outsiders who had a very different vision for tribes like the Ktunaxa. To Christian missionaries, the relatively untainted nature of the inland Northwest by other European-Americans promised one of the last opportunities to bring their faith to those still practicing ‘savage’ spiritual customs. After early successes, the missionaries who came to the region found increasing resistance to their conversion efforts. However, the Western understanding of the natural world these missionaries carried with them ultimately affected the tribes in ways the Christian idealists could hardly have imagined.

One of the most significant ideas first introduced by the fur traders was a new form of religion. Though unconcerned with proselytizing their faith, the voyageurs did bring a predominantly Catholic understanding of the world into Ktunaxa territory.<sup>87</sup> Perhaps having the greatest impact in acquainting the various Ktunaxa bands with Christianity were the members of some eastern tribes in the employ of the fur traders who

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<sup>87</sup> Though David Thompson was Anglican, many of the Company’s employees were French-Canadians who, along with the Iroquois, knew the Catholic faith.

had adopted certain principles of the new faith through their previous contact with missionaries.<sup>88</sup>

With the prospect of new souls to convert, Canadian fur traders could not claim to be the only Euro-Americans along the Kootenai River forever. Catholic missionaries soon found their way into the region as well. Though the remoteness of the area kept all but the most intrepid travelers away for many decades, by the mid-1840s the people of the Kootenai River Valley faced a new group of outsiders, clothed in black, who saw the members of the tribe themselves, not the furs and hides they collected, as their primary goal.

The single most important name associated with the early missions to southern portions of the Ktunaxa homeland is that of the Jesuit priest, Father Pierre-Jean De Smet. Born in Belgium, De Smet finished his Jesuit training in Maryland and at the order's new school for Indian youth outside of St. Louis, Missouri.<sup>89</sup> Ordained in 1827, De Smet began ministering to area tribes and was sent to establish a mission with the Potawatomi near Council Bluffs along the Missouri River in present-day Iowa.

De Smet's experiences with the Potawatomi soon disillusioned him. The effects of prolonged white contact, particularly the demoralizing impact of the introduction of diseases and alcohol to the tribe, made his experience among the tribe disheartening.<sup>90</sup> It also helped convince him that for the Jesuit cause to be successful among the native

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<sup>88</sup> For a discussion of several Iroquois who came with the fur traders and the role they played in introducing Christianity see Olga Johnson, *Flathead and Kootenay: The Rivers, the Tribes and the Region's Traders* (Glendale, CA: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1969).

<sup>89</sup> Peterson and Peers, 83.

<sup>90</sup> Hiram Martin Chittenden and Alfred Talbot Richardson, *Life, Letters and Travels of Father Pierre-Jean De Smet, S. J.* Vol. 1 (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1905), 16-18.

peoples of North America, members of his order would have to find a remote region whose inhabitants had only limited contact with Euro-Americans.

The guiding examples for De Smet and the small group of Jesuits ministering to the tribes of the West were the legendary seventeenth-century missions among the Guarani people of Paraguay.<sup>91</sup> In the Paraguayan Reductions the Jesuits had succeeded in converting large numbers of indigenous inhabitants before the missionaries' forcible removal from Spanish possessions and their disbanding as an order of the Catholic Church in 1773. After the reestablishment of the Society of Jesus in 1814, the Jesuits dreamed of reliving their proudest moments in the wilds of South America. When the opportunity to establish missions in the upper Columbia basin eventually presented itself, De Smet and his associates jumped at the opportunity to establish their own "wilderness kingdom" for God.<sup>92</sup>

In one of the more unique events of the Christian proselytization efforts in the New World, the Ktunaxa's neighbors and frequent allies, the Bitterroot Salish and Nez Perce, actually requested the presence of Catholic priests. Having learned about the religion of the "black robes" from several Iroquois who had come west with the fur traders, members of these upper Columbia basin tribes sent delegations across the mountains and down the Missouri River to invite Catholic priests their homeland. After three unsuccessful trips to the east, two Bitterroot Salish, Pierre Gaucher and Young

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<sup>91</sup> Peterson and Peers, 84, 97.

<sup>92</sup> Peterson and Peers, 117.



Ignace, made one final attempt. Traveling down the Missouri, they happened to meet Father De Smet at his Council Bluffs mission.<sup>93</sup>

After a meeting of the order in St. Louis, church leaders decided to send the eager Father De Smet west. The next spring, the adventurous Jesuit priest traveled with American traders to Green River where he found a group of Salish men sent to guide him to the nearby valley of Pierre's Hole where 1,600 members of the Bitterroot Salish and Pend d'Oreilles tribes had traveled far from their homeland to meet him.<sup>94</sup> De Smet grew so encouraged by the tribes' eagerness to learn about Catholicism that after several weeks with the group he headed back to St. Louis to find resources for a large missionary effort without ever viewing the upper Columbia basin homeland of the tribes.

In 1841, Father De Smet, along with two other priests and three lay brothers of the order, arrived in western Montana to build the beginnings of their own Paraguay with the establishment of St. Mary's Mission among the Salish in the Bitterroot Valley. With the help of the area's traditional inhabitants who provided the priests with the guides, food, building materials, and labor necessary to construct the mission, the Jesuits' cathedral in the wilderness was soon completed. The fathers then quickly went to work educating the tribe about the Church and its edicts.

In the months and years that followed, the "black robes" greatly expanded their presence in the region.<sup>95</sup> In rapid succession priests opened missions in the neighboring Coeur d'Alene, Pend d'Oreille, Colville, and Blackfoot tribal areas. Though the

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<sup>93</sup> Chittenden and Richardson, 29.

<sup>94</sup> Chittenden and Richardson, 32-33.

<sup>95</sup> Peterson and Peers, 24.

missionary presence remained relatively small due to the remoteness of the region and the challenges in accessing supplies and assistance, the great devotion and optimism of men like Father De Smet overcame remarkable obstacles in order to bring their religion to the indigenous inhabitants of the inland Northwest.

An incessant traveler, De Smet and several of his brethren made a number of trips into the Kootenai River Valley during their first years in the Columbia Basin with the hopes of bringing Christianity to the Ktunaxa people. Father De Smet had met small groups of Ktunaxa when they came to visit their Salish-speaking allies among whom the Jesuits had already established missions. He also visited a Ktunaxa encampment below Flathead Lake in the spring of 1842 where he introduced the band to Catholic prayers and baptized their children. According to De Smet, the enthusiasm these Ktunaxa displayed, in which they “unanimously declared themselves in favor of my religion,” convinced the priest that he needed to travel deeper into the tribe’s homeland.<sup>96</sup>

After a trip to Europe to raise support for his efforts, Father De Smet returned to the Ktunaxa in 1845. When he arrived at Tobacco Plains after a journey up the Kootenai River, De Smet commented on how rapidly the teachings of the new religion he had introduced three years before had been adopted by some members of the tribe. “Since my last visit they have followed, to the very letter, all they remembered of my recommendations. [. . .] They habitually assembled for morning and evening prayer,

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<sup>96</sup> Chittenden and Richardson, 370.

continued the practice of singing canticles, and faithfully observed the Sabbath precept.”<sup>97</sup>

Though De Smet spent limited time with the Ktunaxa, and only the southernmost bands at that, the Jesuit father established the framework for future relationships between promoters of Christianity and the tribe. Much like their dealings with the Canadian fur traders, the Ktunaxa’s association with the Jesuits was quite ephemeral, involving only a few limited meetings with De Smet and the Jesuits. Furthermore, though De Smet described generally amicable meetings with the Ktunaxa in which large numbers of individuals appeared to embrace his religion, it is clear that the tribe firmly retained its power. The bands themselves maintained control in the region, and the missionary influence persisted only thanks to the tribes’ continued acceptance of the “black robes.” Given the transitory presence of the Jesuits which lacked military support, it is clear that the Ktunaxa bands’ hospitable reception of the missionaries was the choice of the native people themselves.

To Father De Smet and his associates, the first years of the missions to the inland Northwest tribes appeared to promise the success of their new Paraguay. The priests noted with near disbelief the willingness of the tribes to construct mission buildings, learn Catholic prayers, and sit for hours listening to lectures on the Christian God. Between 1841 and 1842, the priests baptized thousands of Bitterroot Salish, Coeur d’Alene, Pend Oreille, Colville, Blackfeet, and Ktunaxa as they traveled and built other missions in the region.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Pierre-Jean De Smet, S.J. *Oregon Missions and Travels over the Rocky Mountains in 1845-46* (Fairfield, WA: Ye Galleon Press, 1978) 126.

However, it quickly became apparent that the upper Columbia Basin would not easily become the shining light of native Catholicism the priests had imagined. After a few months of missionary presence, the tribes realized that the Jesuits wanted to control the native peoples' everyday lives. The power they had originally sought from the priests also appeared to bring few benefits. By 1846 the head chief of the Bitterroot Salish could no longer convince his people to listen to the priests, which forced the closure of St. Mary's mission in a few short years.<sup>99</sup>

The Ktunaxa and their Salish neighbors adopted from the priests and the new religion only what they found helpful. Although they may have appeared fervent in their prayers, Father Mengarini, one of De Smet's fellow priests, noted that these prayers often "consisted in asking to live a long time, to kill plenty of animals and enemies, and to steal the greatest number of the [enemies'] horses possible."<sup>100</sup> The peoples of the upper Columbia Basin incorporated only the Christian ideas they considered beneficial, and many tribes soon lost interest when the religion of the "black robes" failed to live up to the expectations which had originally impelled them to invite the Jesuit missionaries in the first place.

While the Ktunaxa bands and their neighbors generally remained in control of their early relationships with Jesuits, the Catholic presence introduced significant dangers for the people of the region. Largely concerned with abolishing traditional Ktunaxa culture, these missionaries posed a greater threat to the Ktunaxa way of life than did the

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<sup>98</sup> Peterson and Peers, 24.

<sup>99</sup> Peterson and Peers, 98.

<sup>100</sup> Peterson and Peers, 24.

fur traders. Of his 1845 trip to the Kootenai River Valley, De Smet wrote that “[o]n the feast of the Holy Heart of Mary I sang High Mass, thus taking spiritual possession of this land, which was now for the first time trodden by a minister of the Most High.”<sup>101</sup> These spiritual leaders had their own vision for a new “wilderness kingdom” which left little room for the traditional cultures of the region.

Unlike the fur traders, De Smet and the Jesuits actively worked to detach the Ktunaxa and their neighbors from their own spiritual identity, end the traditional subsistence cycle, and reconfigure the tribe’s relationship with the environment. The tribes had hoped to gain power from the Jesuits which might assist them in hunting and protect them in their continual warfare with the Blackfeet. Instead, the priests demanded that they become sedentary agrarian farmers. For the Ktunaxa and their neighbors, an end of the bison hunts and of seasonal hunting and gathering practices threatened separation from the landscape that had long sustained their culture.

As threatening as the Jesuit presence may have appeared to the native cultures of the upper Columbia Basin, the tribes continued to live their lives in the traditional ways for decades after the arrival of Father De Smet. For the Ktunaxa especially, the isolated nature of the Kootenai River Valley greatly limited their encounters with the Jesuits. Nevertheless, like David Thompson and the fur traders, these Catholic fathers introduced a new understanding of land that would eventually precipitate much more social and cultural damage than the immediate physical impacts of the early relationship between Euro-Americans and native peoples.

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<sup>101</sup> De Smet, 127.

## *New Ideas*

The introduction of copper kettles, firearms and Bibles had powerful impacts on the lives of the Ktunaxa and their neighbors. Father De Smet and the Jesuits in particular challenged Ktunaxa culture with their disdain for traditional spiritual and subsistence practices. Yet for the first half of the nineteenth century, the Ktunaxa and the nearby Salish-speaking tribes largely retained their autonomy during the influx of Euro-American outsiders. They used their interactions with the traders and missionaries to their benefit, and if they grew frustrated with the newcomers they could refuse to trade or attend church with little interference from the outsiders, who had no recourse other than to respect the tribes' decisions.

However, the ideas that would in time nearly destroy Ktunaxa culture were already at work behind this relatively peaceful façade. As David Abram argues in *The Spell of the Sensuous*, the introduction of writing and cartography served to separate indigenous cultures in drastic ways from the environment that surrounded them. "The alphabetized intellect stakes its claim to the earth by *staking it down*, extends its dominion by drawing a grid of straight lines and right angles across the body of a continent [...] with scant regard for the oral people that already live there."<sup>102</sup> In Western culture, through centuries of increasing reliance on such symbolic systems, many European cities became great centers of learning where collections of books and maps represented much of Western society's understanding of the world.

This worldview had reached its height during the European Enlightenment which entailed substantial changes including the institutionalization of the natural sciences and

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<sup>102</sup> Abram, 267.

of geography, the fostering of a powerful desire to expand knowledge of the world through voyages of discovery, and the aspiration by European states to magnify their power through the colonization of much of this newly revealed territory.<sup>103</sup> Of great importance to these prevailing trends in Enlightenment thought were developing new forms of travel and warfare, novel ways of codifying state control over territories in Europe and abroad, and innovative ways to collect, survey, and catalogue the expansive increases in Western knowledge. These requirements led to the professionalization of cartography, an increased reliance on maps and a simultaneous expansion of the legal mechanisms that provided a framework for colonialism such as property rights and the establishment of firm national borders.<sup>104</sup>

In the early nineteenth century this worldview, which had helped maintain European colonialism across the globe, entered the Kootenai River drainage. Emblematic of this ideology, which was introduced by David Thompson and by those who followed him to the region, are the skillfully-made maps for which Thompson himself is now celebrated. An accomplished cartographer with decades of experience travelling the vast extent of the North West Company's commercial empire, Thompson produced remarkably accurate maps that helped guide a generation of explorers and fur traders. In

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<sup>103</sup> J. B. Harley, "The Map and the Development of the History of Cartography," *The History of Cartography*, Volume 1, J.B. Harley and David Woodward editors (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 8-20.

<sup>104</sup> An interesting case study in the role Enlightenment thought played in Colonialism is offered in James E. McClellan III, *Colonialism and Science: Saint Domingue and the Old Regime* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2010).

fact, his journals are so devoted to cartographic notations that the sequence of events is nearly eclipsed by records of longitude and latitude.<sup>105</sup>

David Thompson, “the greatest practical land geographer who ever lived” according to the acclaimed geographer J. B. Tyrell, serves as the exemplar of the Euro-American understanding of land as a commodity, something that can be described on paper and that can be carved up and owned.<sup>106</sup> Though he maintained cordial relations with the native peoples he worked with, Thompson knew his explorations had implications for those who would eventually come to possess the land. In the early years, he knew his work contributed to the commercial battle that existed between the North West and Hudson’s Bay Companies. During his later travels, Thompson understood that his exploration of the Columbia and the maps he produced of the area could help strengthen the British claim over the Oregon Country.<sup>107</sup>

Thompson’s interests in exploration, surveying and mapmaking, rather than a desire to become rich in the fur trade, drove him across the Rocky Mountains. The work certainly proved difficult, but it remained a source of enjoyment and pride for years after he left the region. Much of Euro-American knowledge of the upper Columbia Basin came from Thompson’s work, a fact he was keenly aware of. And yet, the great explorer received little credit or compensation for it. Thompson died in Montreal, unrecognized and in poverty in 1857 after years battling with London publishers, who he claimed had

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<sup>105</sup> Jack Nisbet, *Sources of the River: Tracking David Thomson Across Western North America* (Seattle, WA: Sasquatch Books, 1994).

<sup>106</sup> From the famed geologist and cartographer J. B. Tyrell who rediscovered Thompson and published his *Narrative* for the first time, quoted in Thompson, *Travels*, 5.

<sup>107</sup> During the treaty negotiations in 1846, Thompson wrote frustrated letters to the British Foreign Secretary to argue that based on his work in surveying and opening up the region, the Columbia River, rather than the 49<sup>th</sup> Parallel, should be the new international border. Jenish, 9.



plagiarized his maps of the millions of square miles he had explored, and despairing over the British government's disposal of his beloved Oregon Country in the hands of the Americans. Further contributing to his obscurity, Thompson's *Narrative* of his travels remained unpublished for fifty years after his death.<sup>108</sup>

Throughout Thompson's journeys, the native peoples he encountered recognized the explorer's different understanding of the world. He received the name "Koo Koo Sint," meaning "the man who looks at stars," from the Bitterroot Salish who watched him make some of the thousands of astronomical observations used to determine the longitude and latitude of his position.<sup>109</sup> What must native people have made of the strange instruments Thompson used and the unusual behaviors he displayed? Even if understood, the maps would have held little meaning for the Ktunaxa. These documents were based on bizarre principles, such as the distance from Greenwich, England, rather than more practical frames of reference for the Ktunaxa such as the optimal place to gather camas or where to best hunt bison.

Thompson's maps symbolized an understanding of landscape and the environment which differed radically from the traditional Ktunaxa approach to their surroundings. The imposition of a worldview that valued lines and boundaries and that allowed for property ownership implied more than the simple redistribution of the Ktunaxa population within their traditional homeland. Instead, it signaled a drastic transformation in the way native people related to the more-than-human world.

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<sup>108</sup> Jenish, 255-283.

<sup>109</sup> Jenish, 7.

Father De Smet also carried very similar ideas regarding boundaries and property as David Thompson. Though certainly not as skilled in surveying as his predecessor in the upper Columbia Basin, De Smet devoted some of his time in the region to map making. In his journals he noted, “I availed myself of the best information I could obtain from trappers and intelligent Indians who were well acquainted with the mountain passes and the course of the rivers. Not having had instruments with me, the maps were necessarily only an approximation to the true positions.”<sup>110</sup> Regardless of their accuracy, De Smet’s maps suggest that the Jesuit viewed the landscape within a Western frame of reference, conceiving of it as something that could be translated into lines on paper.

At the Fort Laramie Treaty negotiations between the U.S. government and the tribes of the northern Great Plains in 1851, Father De Smet undertook the task of drawing the official map for the conference. The Jesuit’s familiarity with the tribes he encountered on his many trips along the Missouri had led the government’s commissioners to request his presence on their delegation.<sup>111</sup> With the purported goal of establishing peace between these often warring peoples, the United States forced the tribes present to decide which parts of the Northern Plains belonged to which tribe. The U.S.-recognized territory of such tribes as the Blackfeet, who chose not to have delegates present, was largely determined by delegations of their enemies who did attend the conference.

The map Father De Smet produced for the Fort Laramie negotiations in many ways represents the culmination of the Western concept of landscape as something to be owned and divided. For decades, maps of the North American interior produced by De

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<sup>110</sup> Chittenden and Richardson, 137.

<sup>111</sup> Peterson and Peers, 24.

Smet, Thompson, Lewis and Clark, and others indicated the presence of native peoples using a Euro-American version of a tribe's name to label the area where it could be found.<sup>112</sup> No attempt was made to divide the land among native groups, either due to the difficulty of such an exercise or its futility in a region where such boundaries were constantly in flux. However, perhaps for the first time in this part of the continent, De Smet's 1851 map attempted to establish for the federal government legal limits to the traditional territories of native peoples.

Perhaps surprisingly, De Smet also recognized the dangers associated with such boundary delineations on maps. On his way to the 1851 Fort Laramie treaty, he wrote in his journal of his map-making duties:

“In the limits which I trace he [the President] will find an extent of country vast enough to be represented by three or four stars more of the first magnitude, which will enhance the lustre of the galaxy in the flag of the Union. [...] But then, [...] What will become of the aborigines, who have possessed it from time immemorial. This is indeed a thorny question, awakening gloomy ideas in the observer's mind, if has followed the encroaching policy of the United States in regard to the Indian.”<sup>113</sup>

Unfortunately, by the time De Smet passed away in 1873 he had lived to see much of this pessimistic vision of the future come to pass.

Whether the country belonged to the United States, the British Empire, one of the Indian nations, or the Christian God, of crucial importance to the Euro-American worldview characterized by Thompson and De Smet was that the land must belong to somebody. Only with this concept firmly established could thoughts turn to questions of

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<sup>112</sup> This change in the delineations of native homelands is very apparent in a collection of historical maps of Montana: Kimberly Lugthart and Sally Thompson, *Historical Maps of Montana* (Missoula, MT: University of Montana Lifelong Learning Project 2004).

<sup>113</sup> Chittenden Richardson, 62.

who rightly owned the land. Even if Thompson and De Smet failed to determine territorial limits for the Ktunaxa in any of their maps, the act of map-making, of representing the natural world on a piece of paper, laid the groundwork for such actions.

Even if the fur traders did not immediately claim the land as theirs, they opened the door for such assertions by introducing into the Kootenai River Valley a worldview that allowed for the parceled ownership of the landscape. For the Ktunaxa, the Euro-American understanding of the more-than-human world posed genuine challenges. Given the significance of the natural environment in maintaining Ktunaxa culture and sustaining the tribe's spirituality, history, and body of knowledge, changes to this long-established association with the land proved disastrous. Beyond the introduction of Western religion and new subsistence techniques, the "alphabetized intellect" of maps and the written word threatened to decimate Ktunaxa culture.

### *Conclusion*

The fur trade and the missionaries who followed initiated powerful processes that would eventually transform Ktunaxa lifestyles and significantly alter the Ktunaxa landscape. For nearly fifty years, the effects of the Euro-Americans presence in the Kootenai River Valley did very little to threaten the traditional Ktunaxa way of life. Yet through seemingly insignificant actions, such as drawing watersheds on maps, describing tribal traits in journals, or associating tribal names with particular places, the Kootenai River landscape was eventually taken from its traditional inhabitants.

Though the first years of interaction between Euro-Americans and the Ktunaxa bands seemed peaceful and mutually beneficial on the surface, changes were catalyzed

that would in time have profound consequences for the Ktunaxa and their landscape of meaning. The great geographer and the Jesuit priest who found the peoples of the inland Northwest so welcoming likely failed to comprehend the dangers their cartographic descriptions of the landscape posed for the Ktunaxa and their neighbors. Both of these men considered their time in the region as gratifying and built strong friendships with many of its inhabitants. It was only in later years that some of these early visitors to the Kootenai, like Father De Smet, began to question the impact this newly introduced worldview would have on native peoples such as the Ktunaxa.

Whether they realized it or not, the traders and missionaries who introduced the region to the larger world served as powerful agents of change. The maps they made and the notes they took helped them not only to understand and remember the region but also to share with others the adventures and successes they realized among the peoples of the upper Columbia Basin. With differing degrees of enthusiasm, these outsiders imparted upon the region's indigenous inhabitants a worldview which catalyzed a radical transformation in both the lives of the area's tribes and the relationship between humans and the Kootenai River environment.

At this early stage, the Ktunaxa and neighboring tribes appeared to remain very much in control of their relationships with these new outsiders, taking from their meetings only what they determined to be of benefit for their peoples. However, underneath the surface of these relatively advantageous relationships for both parties, Western ways of thought increasingly began to gain a foothold in the region. In the decades that followed, these Euro-American ways of understanding the natural world led to a total transformation in the Ktunaxa way of life. Change came remarkably quickly,

and the landscape the Ktunaxa had known for generations rapidly found itself divided and possessed by others. Whereas the tribe had once moved freely across a broad landscape deeply imbued with stories and knowledge, previously unknown concepts such as maps and boundary lines would increasingly come to control Ktunaxa lifestyles in the coming decades. In rapid succession, the Ktunaxa bands became separated and removed from the Kootenai River Valley landscape where they had thrived for so long.

## CHAPTER 4

### A LAND BOUNDED, A PEOPLE DIVIDED

“The said confederated tribes of Indians hereby cede, relinquish, and convey to the United States all their right, title, and interest in and to the country occupied or claimed by them, bounded and described as follows [...]”<sup>114</sup>

-Article 1 of the 1855 Hellgate Treaty

The powerful forces unleashed by the introduction of a new understanding of the human relationship with the environment began to pose substantial challenges to the Ktunaxa way of life as the nineteenth century progressed. Though by 1850 five decades had passed since their first contact with Euro-American fur traders, daily life remained much the same. The few physical and social changes to the Ktunaxa lifestyle that had occurred, including the incorporation of firearms and some aspects of the Catholic faith, had been embraced by the bands themselves rather than being forced upon them. However, this was all to change after mid-century with the introduction of much more radical challenges to the traditional Ktunaxa lifestyle and relationship with the Kootenai River Valley.

Questions surrounding land ownership and who belonged where suddenly became increasingly important in the Kootenai River Valley region as the years passed. At first, these issues were of significance only to fur trade company executives and government officials thousands of miles to the east and had little impact on the daily lives of the tribes of the upper Columbia Basin. However, as Euro-American settlers began to populate the region in ever-larger numbers, the answers to these land problems began to have an

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<sup>114</sup> Hellgate Treaty, “Treaty with the Flatheads, Etc.” *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, Charles J. Kappler, ed. Volume 2, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1904-1979), 722-725.

enormous effect on tribes like the Ktunaxa who quickly found themselves removed from much of their traditional homeland.

By late century, most of the Ktunaxa bands were forced onto small reservations and reserves, and their movement across the land became significantly restricted. Though all remained within the broad Ktunaxa homeland, the bands faced separation from each other and from much of the land that contributed significantly to their culture. In only a few quick years, the cartographers and boundary-makers won control over the Kootenai River Valley, and few within the tribe realized what was underway until any real struggle would have been futile.

The final codification of the Western concept of land ownership onto the traditional Ktunaxa environment was symbolized by two events that took place around the middle of the century. Beginning with the Hellgate Treaty negotiated between Washington Territorial Governor Isaac Stevens and representatives of the Bitterroot Salish and Pend d'Oreilles tribes and the Ksanka band of the Ktunaxa in 1855, treaties forced the Ktunaxa onto reserves in Canada and reservations in the United States. A few years earlier in 1846 another significant agreement had been reached when representatives in Washington and London carved up the continent in the Oregon Treaty and placed the new international border along the forty-ninth parallel with little regard for the Ktunaxa bands caught on both sides. Though the Oregon Treaty had relatively few immediate effects on the tribe, its ultimate impact proved particularly acute and egregious for the tribe.

As a result of both the Hellgate and Oregon Treaties, the long-enduring Ktunaxa lifestyle began to collapse around them. As terrible as the effects of alcohol, disease, and



continued land grabs that plagued the reservations eventually became for the Ktunaxa, perhaps the greatest loss was their traditional relationship with the land itself. The more-than-human world of the Kootenai River Valley found itself crossed with lines and fences, for the first time claimed as property by new its inhabitants.

### *The Hellgate Treaty*

The Hellgate Treaty for the first time delineated limits to the extent of a Ktunaxa band's traditional homeland. Though directly concerning only the Ktunaxa bands present in the United States, principally the Ksanka or Libby-Jennings/Dayton-Elmo band, the treaty inaugurated a long period of removals and land cessions for the entire tribe. The negotiations at Hellgate also produced particularly detrimental effects for the Ksanka band as it proved to be the only treaty to permanently restrict a Ktunaxa band's access to the Kootenai River.

By the early 1850s, the U.S. government faced increasing pressure from settlers to control the native peoples of the Pacific Northwest and to open new lands for settlement. Though the tribes of the upper Columbia Basin had always maintained peaceful relations with the Euro-Americans they encountered, they received little better treatment from the new settlers and government officials in Washington than many other tribes that had faced the entry of Euro-Americans with greater hostility. Furthermore, as Americans became aware of the great mineral, timber, and agricultural resources of the Pacific Northwest, the importance of acquiring the homelands of the native residents became increasingly pressing. This desire to permanently acquire the rich lands of the region for

the expanding United States was bolstered with a plan to build a northern transcontinental railroad to connect this far-flung territory with the rest of the nation.

The U.S. government established Washington Territory in 1853 with the intention of bringing greater law and order to the region and settling land issues with the tribes of the region. The man tasked with containing the traditional inhabitants of the Columbia Plateau was the newly appointed Governor and Superintendent of Indian Affairs of Washington Territory: the young and energetic West Point graduate Isaac I. Stevens. An embodiment of the Euro-American map-making worldview, Stevens began his tenure in the region by serving as the chief surveyor for the Northern Pacific's transcontinental railway route on his way west. He saw the tribes he encountered along the way only as impediments to his dream for a prosperous Washington connected to the rest of the nation by the new railroad.<sup>115</sup>

After arriving at his new post in Olympia, Stevens quickly set to work forcing the Territory's native peoples onto reservations. With a view towards Indian policy that conformed to the overall U.S. government approach to native peoples at the time, Stevens worked under the belief that tribes owned the land and therefore could be forced to sign documents that would cede it to the Federal government.<sup>116</sup> During 1854 and 1855 Stevens met with dozens of tribes in areas of present-day Washington, Idaho, and Montana, including the Nisqually, Puyallup, Suquamish, Snoqualmie, Snohomish, Nez Perce, Yakima, and Blackfeet, to negotiate land cessions. When the rash "young man in a

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<sup>115</sup> Richard D. Scheuerman, "Territorial Indian Policy and Tribal Relations," *Indians, Superintendents, and Councils: Northwestern Indian Policy, 1850-1855* Clifford E. Trafzer ed. (New York: University Press of America, 1986), 10.

<sup>116</sup> Clifford Trazer, *Indians, Superintendents, and Councils: Northwestern Indian Policy, 1850-1855*, Clifford E. Trafzer ed. (New York: University Press of America, 1986), 2.

hurry,” as one biographer labeled him, met with resistance he resorted to lies and forgery to reach his aims.<sup>117</sup> Stevens’s heavy-handedness in negotiating with the native tribes, whom the mid-thirty-year-old referred to as “my children,” served as a primary catalyst for armed conflict with the Yakima and other tribes.<sup>118</sup>

Stevens arrived at the junction of the Bitterroot and Clarks Fork Rivers near Hellgate Canyon and present-day Missoula in July of 1855 with hopes of quickly dealing with the Bitterroot Salish, Pend d’Oreille, and Ktunaxa peoples. The relatively peaceful nature of the tribes towards early Euro-Americans travelers had convinced the governor that he could swiftly force tribal leaders to agree to enormous land cessions in return for a few small monetary payments and the construction of a school, hospital, and other limited improvements. Whether due to a lack of understanding of tribal differences or a blatant disregard for them, Stevens also sought to place as many tribes as possible on a single reservation.

The assembled tribes’ resistance to Governor Stevens’s plan took him greatly by surprise. Nearly three hundred and fifty Ktunaxa had joined their Bitterroot Salish and Upper Pend d’Oreille allies to meet the governor near present-day Missoula for what they thought were to be discussions regarding peace between them and their historic enemies, the Blackfeet. When presented with Stevens’s true mission, Chief Michelle of the Ksanka

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<sup>117</sup> Kent D. Richards, *Isaac I. Stevens: Young Man in a Hurry* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1979). An example of Stevens’s treachery was illustrated at the Medicine Creek Council where he forged the signature of Chief Leschi of the Nisquallies on the Treaty after he had walked out of the council, Trazer, 4.

<sup>118</sup> Trazer, 5.

band of Ktunaxa, along with the other assembled elders, intensely rejected the reservation plan.<sup>119</sup>

For days the tribal leaders argued with Stevens, and these tense discussions eventually led Chief Victor of the Bitterroot Salish, whom the governor had named head representative for the three tribes, to walk out in protest of Stevens's condescending and heavy-handed treatment. However, facing the increasing pressures of a growing white presence and resigning themselves to what appeared to be the inevitable, the assembled leaders eventually placed their marks on the document that ultimately confined the three groups to a million-acre section of land along the west slope of the Mission Mountains between Flathead Lake and the Missoula Valley.<sup>120</sup>

Ultimately, the major point of contention proved to be the location of the proposed reservation; Victor and the Bitterroot Salish wanted to remain in the Bitterroot Valley, while Michelle, as well as Chief Alexander of the Upper Pend d'Oreille, desired the new reservation to be further north in the Mission Valley and around the southern end of Flathead Lake. This controversy was solved through an agreement between Chief Victor and Governor Stevens in which, although the northern location would be chosen, the President of the United States would also survey the suitability of the Bitterroot Valley for continued use by Victor's people. Stevens understood well that no government survey team would find in favor of the Bitterroot Salish and that in a few short years they too would be removed to the new Flathead Reservation.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Lee Ann Smith, "The Flathead Treaty Council," *Indians, Superintendents, and Councils: Northwestern Indian Policy, 1850-1855*, Clifford E. Trafzer ed. (New York: University Press of America, 1986), 99-111.

<sup>120</sup> Smith, 108-109.

Though still within traditional Ktunaxa territory, this new reservation was far removed from the Kootenai River which flowed nearly a hundred miles to the northwest. Chief Michelle and the Ksanka elders had negotiated the best deal they thought they could receive from Governor Stevens for their band, and at least their rights to hunt, fish and gather “at all usual and accustomed places” had been preserved.<sup>122</sup> However, in the eyes of the federal officials, the treaty forever determined the boundaries of the entire Ktunaxa tribe within the United States. Members of the Bonners Ferry and Tobacco Plains bands living to the south of the newly designated international border were expected to abide by the provisions of the Hellgate Treaty and, though few did, they were expected to move to the new reservation as well.

Over the course of the next few years, many Ktunaxa grew frustrated with the state of affairs on the Flathead Reservation. An extraordinary level of poverty developed on the reservation as the tribes lost their ability to provide for themselves in their traditional ways and were forced to rely on government provisions. The services promised by the federal government failed to arrive in a timely manner, and when they did they provided little relief from the worsening conditions.<sup>123</sup> In fact, the situation deteriorated so quickly that a fairly large number of Ksanka, including Chief Michelle himself, left the reservation and moved north to join other bands.

However, many others remained and, under the guidance of Chief Aeneas Paul and his son Chief Kustata, worked to maintain traditional Ktunaxa culture within the

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<sup>121</sup> Smith, 110.

<sup>122</sup> Article 3, “Treaty of Hellgate.”

<sup>123</sup> Jaakko Puisto, “This is my Reservation, I Belong Here: The Salish Kootenai Struggle Against Termination,” PhD diss, Tempe, Arizona: Arizona State University, 2000), 60-63.

boundaries of the new reservation.<sup>124</sup> Though of declining importance to the survival of the remaining Ksanka, many traditional gathering, hunting and fishing techniques were preserved through the limited opportunities available on the Flathead Reservation. Elders worked diligently to pass on the tribe's oral history and culture to younger generations. However, it remained a constant challenge to maintain Ktunaxa identity when for many decades nearly every aspect of reservation life and Federal Indian policy worked to destroy the tribe's culture.

Other Ktunaxa bands soon found themselves confined to small fragments of their former homeland. To the north, several Ktunaxa chiefs meet with Judge P. O'Reilly, a Canadian Indian Reserve Commissioner, in order to negotiate reserves for their distinct bands. Against the vocal resistance of tribal leaders, who noted the tribe's decades of hospitality toward outsiders and a desire to continue to practice their traditional ways to life, by the 1880s all of the northern bands were limited to small fractions of the extensive landscape they had traditionally called home. The Canadian government restricted the five northern bands to five tiny sections of land similarly bounded by abstract, linear borders. At least, unlike the Ksanka restricted to the confines of the Mission Valley, the other bands of Ktunaxa remained close by the undulating waters of the Kootenai River.

A very different situation confronted the Bonner's Ferry band of the Ktunaxa who lived as non-treaty Indians for decades after the Hellgate Treaty and its Canadian counterparts. U.S. treaty negotiators either assumed that the small Bonner's Ferry band was covered under the Hellgate Treaty or that it should be dealt with by the Canadian

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<sup>124</sup> For a quick discussion of the Hellgate Treaty see Stuart Chalfant, "Aboriginal Territories." *Interior Salish and Eastern Washington Indians II* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1974) 46-49.

government. For years the few remaining members of the band, not considered by government officials to maintain any right to their ancestral homeland, lived on the margins of the new American settlements that appeared near their traditional winter sites. Only after an unusual chain of events, including a declaration of war against the U.S. government in 1974, did the sixty-seven remaining members of the band receive title to 12.5 acres and recognition as The Kootenai Tribe of Idaho.<sup>125</sup>

Few years passed after the Hellgate Treaty and its Canadian successors before a great rush of Euro-American outsiders appeared to claim the lands from which the Ktunaxa had recently been removed. After prospectors discovered gold along Wild Horse Creek in 1863, thousands of miners swarmed the region and claimed the land for themselves.<sup>126</sup> Not only did these new inhabitants of the Kootenai River Valley claim ownership over the land and its resources in ways which differed vastly from Ktunaxa practices, but the miners, and the lumberman and farmers who followed, left huge scars on the land as they exploited the environment with little care for the future.

With the simple signing of Xs on a piece of parchment, the traditional human relationship with the Kootenai Valley environment changed drastically. Once able to travel widely across a vast portion of the interior Northwest, after Governor Stevens's treaty the Ksanka band became confined to one small area of land which they had to share with two of their long-time allies. It also set a precedent for the many Canadian treaties that eventually came to restrict the movements of the northern Ktunaxa bands.

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<sup>125</sup> Kootenai Tribe of Idaho, *Century of Survival: a Brief History of the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho* (Bonner's Ferry, Idaho: Kootenai Tribe of Idaho, 1990).

<sup>126</sup> A good summary of the Kootenay Gold Rush is offered in John Willis Christian, "The Kootenay Gold Rush : The Placer Decade, 1863-1872," PhD diss. (Pullman, WA: Washington State University, 1967).

For the Ktunaxa people, who had treated early Euro-Americans with great hospitality for the first fifty years after contact and who had been able to maintain much of their traditional relationship with the land, the Hellgate Treaty came as an unexpected and unwarranted sentence.

### *The Oregon Treaty*

In addition to the Hellgate Treaty, perhaps of even greater consequence for the Ktunaxa tribe as a whole in the years to come was another set of negotiations that took place between the United States and the United Kingdom, acting for its dominion of Canada, as the two countries debated ownership over the vast Columbia River Basin.<sup>127</sup> Although the Oregon Treaty was signed several years earlier during the mid-1840s, it took many years for its full consequences to unfold for the Ktunaxa people. The final version of the Oregon Treaty resulted in the demarcation of the international border through the middle of the Kootenai River Valley. Though of little practical impact for the tribe for many decades, the division of the Ktunaxa homeland between these two countries along an arbitrary line presented extraordinary challenges to the continued existence of Ktunaxa tribal structure and further limited Ktunaxa access to the land.

After years of dispute in which both governments claimed large overlapping portions of the Pacific Northwest, representatives finally signed the Oregon Treaty in 1846, slicing North America along the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel. By simply continuing the border line established in earlier talks further to the west, officials in Washington and London

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<sup>127</sup> Oregon Treaty, "Treaty with Great Britain, in Regard to Limits Westward of the Rocky Mountains," Perfected International Treaties, 1778-1945, National Archives Microfilm Publication M1247, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State).



followed the easiest course in their ongoing quest to carve up the North American continent. Though this treaty may have eased tensions between the two nations, it wholly demonstrated the Western understanding of the world as a space to be depicted on maps and divided by lines and revealed a profound lack of knowledge of the Columbia Basin landscape, its geography and its indigenous inhabitants on the part of British and American leaders.

The Oregon question had proven difficult for the nations to settle as both countries desired the wealth of land and natural resources the region offered. Though the fur trade had diminished in importance over the years, the region's other assets began to interest American and Canadian settlers. The abundance of fertile land along the Pacific Coast, especially in valleys such as the Willamette, called to settlers. Additionally, the possibility of exploiting the lush forests that covered the land and the search for the likely existence of mineral wealth excited the populations of both countries. Though by the 1840s very few Euro-Americans had moved to the Oregon countries, accounts of the early explorers, fur-traders and missionaries who had traveled in the Northwest inspired large numbers further east.

The dispute over the placement of the international border also involved powerful political forces surrounding the growing American belief in Manifest Destiny. This conviction that the United States possessed the right to expand over much of the North American continent was heartily embraced by the administration of James Polk, whose party won the election in part by appealing to the expansionist ideology held by many Americans. With slogans such as "fifty-four forty or fight," referring to a desire to acquire the vast majority of the Oregon Country extending far above the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel,

under President James K. Polk's direction the U.S. government pursued an expansionist agenda that quickly led to war with Mexico and which threatened to once again spark conflict with the British.

Rhetoric aside, American leaders generally abhorred the idea of another war with the British and demonstrated a willingness to settle the Oregon question with an amiable agreement. The idea of the 49<sup>th</sup> line of latitude as the best place to divide this part of North America was itself the product of earlier treaties between the two nations, as much of the continent from the Great Lakes to the Continental Divide had already been separated along this line. While British leaders hoped for a settlement following the line of the Columbia River, which would have given them the area occupied by the present state of Washington, Prime Minister Robert Peel's government in Whitehall realized that they would have to settle for much less. In the end the treaty signed by Secretary of State James Buchanan and British Ambassador Richard Parkenham continued the boundary along the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel all the way to Puget Sound and gave Vancouver Island and access to the Strait of Juan de Fuca to the British Crown.<sup>128</sup>

With the boundary dispute peacefully settled, the Oregon region soon witnessed radical economic and social transformations. On the one hand the treaty proved disappointing to the Hudson's Bay Company, and the few traders still operating along the lower Columbia were forced to move north, having perhaps lost more than any other group of Euro-Americans as a result of the settlement. On the other hand, without the threat of someday being forced out by the British, the steady trickle of American settlers

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<sup>128</sup> An excellent discussion of the years of negotiations that eventually resulted in the Oregon Treaty is offered in Howard Jones and Donald A. Rakestraw, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny: Anglo-American Relations in the 1840s* (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1997).

that had previously made their way to Oregon became a flood and the Oregon Trail a veritable highway.

Though the Oregon Treaty may have averted war and opened the region to large-scale Euro-American settlement, this diplomatic triumph for the United States and Britain came at the cost of the people who had for generations called the Pacific Northwest home. Native peoples throughout the region faced the loss of traditional territory and the division of their tribes as a result of the treaty; however Native Americans were not included in the discussions over the boundary line. While it would be several years before Governor Stevens and his northern peers began negotiating with area tribes for land cessions, ownership of the Oregon Country had already been determined in the eyes of these two governments. The resident peoples were granted no voice in deciding which country they wanted to govern the region, or even whether a foreign country had the right to take their land or administer their affairs at all.

This new boundary bisected the continent for hundreds of miles with little consideration for the landscape or peoples involved. Regardless of physical barriers or traditional travel corridors, the new boundary followed a straight line for hundreds of miles, dividing watersheds and families. Rivers such as the Kootenai that meandered across the land now flowed back and forth across the new line. Native peoples found parts of their homeland claimed by rival foreign governments and their travel increasingly limited across the boundary as time passed.

The enormous complexity of the northwest environment, with its twisting rivers, impenetrable forests, impassable mountains, and the numerous groups which had inhabited it for thousands of years, was suddenly reduced to one long and perfectly

straight quill stroke. The Oregon Treaty demonstrated the zenith of the separation of humanity from the more-than-human world which dominated the Western worldview that had first entered the region only a few dozen years earlier. In 1846, leaders in Washington and London, who had never seen the Columbia River and knew little to nothing about the land they were discussing, decided how humans were to interact with the region's environment for generations to come.

While no Ktunaxa representatives participated in the treaty discussions, they clearly had much to lose from the negotiation's outcome. The Oregon Treaty determined which bands of the tribe would eventually be forced to accept the administration of which national government. It separated families and fragmented tribal organization by dividing the northern bands from their southern relatives. The futures of thousands of Ktunaxa was determined not only without any invitation for the input of tribal leaders, but also without their knowledge of the negotiations or any concern by those involved about how the treaty might affect them.

Though not surveyed or delineated on the landscape for several years afterwards, the newly imposed international border played a major role in altering Ktunaxa way of life. The door had now been opened for the negotiation of treaties for the tribes of the Columbia Basin by the United States and British Governments, and representatives such as Governor Stevens soon appeared. While the Ktunaxa bands and their neighbors had largely maintained their autonomy in choosing with whom to trade or deciding which missionaries or settlers they might allow in their homeland, the Oregon Treaty represented the arrival of new foreign officials who claimed for themselves the power to make such choices for the native peoples of the region.

The situation faced by members of the A-kanuxunik' band, who had for generations centered their way of life around the spiritually significant Tobacco Plains, exemplified the hardships the new border generated for the tribe. The line bisected their traditional village site, eventually forcing band leaders to choose on which side to live. When presented with this dilemma by Judge O'Reilly, who negotiated numerous treaties with native peoples in western Canada, one A-kanuxunik' leader, Chief David, purportedly protested, "[w]hat is the meaning of this boundary line? It runs through the middle of my house. Why should you without asking me or considering me, divide my property and also divide my children?"<sup>129</sup> As a result, the band found itself restricted to a tiny 10,531-acre site where members were monitored by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, cut off both from their many relatives in the other Ktunaxa bands and from much of their traditional landscape.

Even for the Ktunaxa bands whose traditional village sites were not bisected by the new border, the 1846 treaty presented significant social and cultural challenges. The future of Ktunaxa organization and leadership at the tribal level received a particularly severe blow from the introduction of the boundary line dividing the Ktunaxa homeland. Though governmental officials were slow to arrive at the border, travel became increasingly restricted over time. The once frequent visits to neighboring bands for festivals and subsistence events such as the bison hunting expeditions had long served an important function in maintaining tribal unity. With new limitations on travel, resulting from the imposition of reservations facilitated by the Oregon Treaty as well as the new administrative hurdles which restricted movement across the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel, only the

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<sup>129</sup> Johnson, 344.

passage of a relatively few individuals each year between bands helped maintain dwindling ties among the bands.

As the years passed, the bands found themselves facing very different government policies on each side of the border. For the Ksanka in particular, it quickly became apparent that they held increasingly more in common with the Salish-speaking tribes with whom they shared the Flathead Reservation, than with their blood relatives to the north. For the Ktunaxa tribe's unity to be continued, their leaders would have to surmount significant challenges to keep the flow of tribal knowledge intact.

The U.S.-Canadian border exemplifies the frequently oblivious nature of the Western understanding of landscape and the natural world. The men who decided how to carve nations out of the Kootenai River Valley had never visited the region, walked along the river's banks, or held a conversation with one of the traditional inhabitants of this remarkable landscape. Instead, they held a very different knowledge of the region gained from reports and political wrangling, rather than the experiential understanding developed by the Ktunaxa and their neighbors over many generations. These government officials studied maps and globes to guide their hands as they drew bold lines on paper, symbolic representations of physical barriers that would eventually be established along their paths.

Like the 1855 Hellgate Treaty, the division of the Pacific Northwest between the nations of the United States and Canada demonstrates the lasting damage eventually inflicted by the ideas first introduced to the Ktunaxa by early Euro-American visitors such as David Thompson and Father De Smet. When the Ktunaxa first observed Thompson using his strange instruments to look at the stars, none could have imagined

that the great geographer was in many ways claiming victory for his culture over the Kootenai River Valley environment. Suddenly, in the course of a single generation, the traditional inhabitants of this region, who had previously enjoyed the freedom to travel vast distances across the landscape, faced new intractable barriers which divided the land and restricted its traditional human inhabitants to minuscule sections of their homeland.

### *Making Sense of a Divided Land*

The Oregon and Hellgate Treaties laid the groundwork for further divisions of the Kootenai River Valley landscape. With the Libby-Jennings band removed from its banks and the other bands confined within small portions of their traditional homeland, the Kootenai Valley quickly became populated by thousands of Euro-American settlers, miners and lumbermen. With them came many new partitions of the land into private property and the thoughtless destruction of extensive areas of this once verdant, beautiful and resource-rich ecosystem.

Where the Ktunaxa had once gathered kinnikinnik and camas, by the 1860s gold seekers were claiming ownership of creek beds and American settlers were filing for homestead grants from the federal government. Several gold rushes, including a large find along Wild Horse Creek in 1863 in present-day British Columbia, brought thousands more newcomers to the region. The arrival of three transcontinental railroads in the 1880s and 1890s, the Northern Pacific, the Great Northern and the Canadian Pacific, contributed to the increase in the number of homesteaders entering the region. These land deeds and rail lines divided the landscape further and brought decades of environmental destruction to the traditional homeland of the Ktunaxa.

What did these new lines mean for the people who had for centuries called the Kootenai region home? Boundary lines clearly disrupted the fluidity and sinuousness of the Ktunaxa landscape. While natural barriers such as lofty mountain ranges and swift rivers had long characterized the region, the challenges they presented were overcome with relative ease by those who held an intimate understanding of the region, and they were also formations that could be explained within the parameters of the tribe's spiritual knowledge and oral traditions. In contrast, the new boundaries represented the imposition of human limitations on the landscape, placed there by outsiders with little knowledge of the region, which nearly severed the relationship between humans and the environment that had sustained the traditional inhabitants of the Kootenai River Valley for generations.

A cartographic indication, the 49<sup>th</sup> line of latitude north of the equator divided watersheds and families. As already noted, the Ktunaxa suddenly found their tribe divided by a strange new concept, the International Boundary, with two separate groups of officials claiming ownership and right of governance over the tribe's Kootenai River Valley home. As demonstrated during the later treaty negotiations, intense feelings of resentment and indignation rose among the Ktunaxa as a result of the introduction of these limits. How could any government official have possibly interpreted the Oregon Treaty for the region's native inhabitants? Abstract lines and bizarre resolutions negotiated in far-removed places had resulted in the assignment of barriers upon the land which were unimaginable within Ktunaxa cultural understanding. Even when surveyors visibly marked these dividing lines on the ground, how could one comprehend why one



tree was now considered American and another a few feet to the north was British property?

New reservation and reserve boundaries limited Ktunaxa travel, physically removing bands from the landscape intricately intertwined with Ktunaxa history, culture, and spirituality. Given that the Kootenai River Valley and the surrounding environment played such a significant role in maintaining Ktunaxa identity, this new situation presented severe challenges to the continued cultural survival of the tribe. Without being able to participate in the once-frequent bison hunts or bitterroot gathering trips, how could the Ktunaxa's youngest members learn their tribal history and traditional practices? With the annual subsistence cycle crippled, if not completely broken, and movement between bands nearly non-existent, the Ktunaxa stood on the brink of annihilation as a unique living culture.

The North American West was now a map-maker's paradise where 'surveying' and 'title' became essential terms. In the course of a generation, the European understanding of landscape as exhibited in the art of cartography had come to dominate the Kootenai Valley region. The Western understanding of the natural world had asserted its title to the Kootenai River Valley with little regard for the people who inhabited it. As David Abram describes,

"The alphabetized intellect stakes its claim to the earth by *staking it down*, extending its dominion by drawing a grid of straight lines and right angles across the body of a continent—across North America, across Africa, across Australia—defining states and provinces, counties and countries with scant regard for the oral peoples that already live there, according to a calculative logic utterly oblivious to the life of the land."<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Abram, 267.

The lines drawn across the Ktunaxa homeland by the mid-nineteenth century treaties represented more than a change in ownership; they symbolized a radically different understanding of landscape.

In addition to providing the legal mechanisms for determining who could live where on the continent, the Oregon and Hellgate treaties' land allocations reflected an understanding of landscape as property which could be owned and sold. The more-than-human world was carved up according to a set of human-imposed coordinates, and it became more important to know in which nation and on whose property one was situated rather than where the creator had formed the first Ktunaxa people or where ceremonies must be held to thank the earth for its bounty. Man now assumed mastery over the land by building fences and claiming ownership over every natural object within a surveyed section of land. An area long understood as an important *place* for the Ktunaxa, imbued with history, spirituality and tradition, was now seen by many of the new Euro-American settlers as little more than a blank *space* to be exploited for maximum wealth.

The region's new Western inhabitants' ignorance of and disregard for the natural world had significant consequences for the Kootenai River Valley in the years that followed. The extraordinarily destructive activities of commercial logging and mining replaced the sustainable hunting, fishing and gathering practices that had long characterized the extent of human involvement with the environment. These attempts to wrestle every last dollar from the extraction of the land's resources, even at the expense of human life, continued well into the twentieth century; an enormous asbestos-contaminated vermiculite mine a few miles upriver from Libby made the surrounding

area the most deadly Environmental Protection Agency Superfund Site in the United States.<sup>131</sup>

The separation between humans and the land also came with significant costs to the traditional inhabitants of the Kootenai region. In the years after the signing of the treaties, the Ktunaxa people quickly found themselves required to live in government housing, have their youth educated at mission schools, and watch their long-practiced subsistence cycle be replaced with forced attempts at agriculture and ranching. Traditional tribal knowledge, acquired over generations of living in the Kootenai River Valley region and maintained through a close spiritual relationship with the land, now faced imminent destruction. As the Ktunaxa bands became separated from their traditional environment, they also became detached from physical representations of their culture which saturated the tribe's ancestral homeland.

When considered in light of Keith Basso's research on the cultural, social and ethical importance of the environment for native peoples, the profound effects of the Ktunaxa's forced separation from their traditional homeland become evident. As in the case of Western Apache society described by Basso, physical places are associated with place names and are imbued with historical stories and moral lessons for the Ktunaxa people as well. The removal of the people from the landscape which helps sustain their culture presented significant challenges to the continued survival of Ktunaxa cultural identity. Without frequent access to these geographical mnemonic devices, traditions are

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<sup>131</sup> More information on the history of vermiculite mining in the Libby area and its deadly effects on the local population can be found in Andrew Schneider and David McCumber, *An Air That Kills: How The Asbestos Poisoning of Libby, Montana Uncovered a National Scandal* (New York: Putnam, 2004), and the United State Environmental Protection Agency, <http://www.epa.gov/libby.html>.

passed down to younger generations with increasing difficulty.<sup>132</sup> What might prompt the telling of a story if the physical location of the tale was inaccessible? If generations of Ktunaxa failed to visit a particular place, would the meaning of that location and the moral lessons associated with it be lost forever?

In the aftermath of the mid-nineteenth century treaties, the Ktunaxa found themselves left with merely the memories of the more-than-human world they once knew so well. Sitting in new government-managed housing, tribal elders told stories of the large communal festivals that once brought the tribe together and which sustained respect among the bands and the natural world. They described to younger generations the roar of great falls of the Kootenai and the dangerous snow-covered mountain passes the tribe had once deftly crossed. How does a culture such as the Ktunaxa, for which the natural environment plays such a significant role, face such threats and still preserve their tribal identity? Only with great will power, with elders determined to pass down their collective body of knowledge and young generations intent on learning what it meant to be a member of their band and of the Ktunaxa tribe as a whole, could Ktunaxa culture continue to be sustained.

The division of the Kootenai River Valley landscape carried with it challenges for the traditional inhabitants of the region which proved far more dangerous to Ktunaxa cultural survival than the government treaty negotiators could have predicted. The new lines dividing the Kootenai environment threatened to sever Ktunaxa family ties, tribal unity and traditional practices. Perhaps most importantly of all, they also endangered the

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<sup>132</sup> Basso, 89-90.

human relationship with the landscape that had been maintained for hundreds of years within the Ktunaxa homeland.

### *Conclusion*

The Euro-American view of the natural world, first introduced to the Ktunaxa by David Thompson in the early years of the nineteenth century, achieved its ultimate codification over the Kootenai River Valley and the people who called it home with the ratification of the Oregon and Hellgate treaties. In the course of barely fifty years, the Ktunaxa went from living a lifestyle intimately connected with an extensive landscape to being confined to a few small portions of their original homeland. Not only did the tribe lose access to enormous tracts of their native landscape and the subsistence activities they had long practiced within it, but Ktunaxa culture stood on the brink of destruction as the bands became separated from not only the land, but also from the communal activities that had united these otherwise very diverse peoples into a single political and cultural entity.

The 1855 Hellgate Treaty presented the Ksanka band of the Ktunaxa with a set of unacceptable yet unavoidable limits on the band's ability to participate in the landscape so essential to its culture. Restricted to a small fraction of the expansive landscape previously frequented by the tribe, subsistence patterns changed radically from bison hunting and fishing to agriculture and grazing, while traditional ceremonial practices nearly vanished. New forms of government and education came to dominate the lives of the Ksanka people as they faced the many trials presented by U.S. federal Indian policy.

Though its effects were largely delayed, the Oregon Treaty proved even more detrimental to the Ktunaxa over the years that followed. With questions of ownership resolved between the United States and Britain, these governments now operated as if the land were solely theirs and that the treaties with the tribes were only a formality. As travel became restricted across the newly imposed line, family ties between the bands became difficult to maintain, and organization and leadership at the tribal level weakened. More than simply limiting the once-extensive travels of the Ktunaxa, these treaties and the Western understanding of the natural world they reflected introduced barriers that nearly severed the tribe's relationship with the natural world and endangered the continued survival of Ktunaxa cultural identity. The "alphabetized intellect" described by David Abram had come to dominate the human relationship with the larger Kootenai River Valley landscape.<sup>133</sup>

As difficult as it may have been to cope with the Hellgate and Oregon treaties, both representations of the new Euro-American understanding of landscape, these only set the stage for the imposition of other more troubling measures for the Ktunaxa people in the years that followed. A much heavier missionary presence appeared in the region and constructed St. Ignatius Mission on the Flathead Reservation and St. Eugene Mission in southeastern British Columbia.<sup>134</sup> The missionaries and government officials encouraged a lifestyle based on farming, a practice with which the Ktunaxa had little previous experience other than raising their traditional tobacco plants. Both the Canadian

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<sup>133</sup> Abram, 267.

<sup>134</sup> In a unique act of reappropriation, St. Eugene Mission has been turned into a golf resort and casino by a partnership of Ktunaxa and neighboring tribes. The boarding school building where Catholicism was forced upon thousands of children is now a beautifully restored tourist hotel.

and U.S. governments also endorsed allotment policies aimed at breaking apart communal society and turning over to white settlers increasing amounts of land within reservations and reserves. After signing the Hellgate Treaty, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes failed to receive any reservation land in the Bitterroot Valley as they thought they had been promised.<sup>135</sup> Under the Dawes Act, tribal members on the remaining Flathead Reservation received family allotments to only one fifth of the land while the rest became open to settlement by Euro-American homesteaders.<sup>136</sup>

By the late 1850s the lives of the Ktunaxa people had transformed drastically. They now grappled with a new order comprised of foreign legal theories and radically divergent views on fundamental concepts such as education, spirituality, and the means of subsistence. The outside agency of Euro-Americans, embodied by men such as Governor Stevens who supported this vastly differing worldview, came to supersede many traditional Ktunaxa practices. The traditional relationship with the land with its intricate connections to Ktunaxa spirituality, history, and lifestyles, to a great extent had lost its power to guide Ktunaxa society and maintain tribal identity.

This enormous loss of control among the Ktunaxa over their own lives also led to the fragmentation of the complex networks of family, band, tribal and inter-tribal relationships significant to Ktunaxa society. No more could entire villages of Ktunaxa battle the elements and their eastern enemies in order to cross the mountains and hunt for bison. No longer could men from Tobacco Plains or the other upriver bands travel to the Bonner's Ferry region and help their relatives fish or hunt deer.

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<sup>135</sup> Puisto, 60-63.

<sup>136</sup> Puisto, 69.

As it became increasingly difficult to make decisions as a tribe and for individuals to maintain their Ktunaxa cultural identity, the remarkable links these residents of the Kootenai River Valley had maintained for generations with the natural world around them stood dangerously close to complete destruction by the new lines that crisscrossed the Ktunaxa homeland. After a mere fifty years of relatively peaceful contact with a small number of foreigners, the continued existence of Ktunaxa society appeared in grave peril. Only the most extraordinary of efforts could continue to hold the tribe together, keep the unique Ktunaxa language alive, and transmit tribal knowledge to younger generations.



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

The cars stretch as far as the eye can see at the trailhead for the short path down to Kootenai Falls. Hundreds of Ktunaxa from all seven bands have made the journey to visit the powerful river that has contributed so significantly to Ktunaxa cultural identity for centuries. Each summer tribal elders, families and children travel from across the West, from the cities of Seattle and Portland, from Elmo on the Flathead Reservation, and from across the U.S.-Canadian border to gather for this ceremony of unity by the banks of rushing Kootenai River. They have come to spend time together and celebrate the enormous steps that have been made over the past decades in preserving traditional Ktunaxa culture and language.

Rejecting the arbitrary boundary lines that appeared during the nineteenth century, the Kootenai Falls gathering represents a cohesive Ktunaxa tribe once more. Like the river coursing through the rocky gorge in front of them, these joined Ktunaxa bands have rejected the cartographer's limits and come together to celebrate their cultural identity. The Euro-American "alphabetized intellect" may have posed great challenges to the continued maintenance of tribal spirituality, history, and identity, but in spite of the many difficulties the bands have faced over the two centuries since the arrival of David Thompson in their homeland, the Ktunaxa are once again the people of the Kootenai River Valley.

Euro-American outsiders brought many changes to the Kootenai River Valley and its aboriginal residents during the nineteenth century. However, as transformative as the introduction of Western religion and trade goods may have been, a seemingly innocuous

set of new ideas proved to be truly world-altering for the Ktunaxa people. This study has demonstrated the process through which the map-makers and land partitions came to dominate the Kootenai region during the nineteenth century. It has also discussed many of the extraordinary challenges the imposition of this Western understanding of the natural environment has caused for the Ktunaxa people over the past two centuries.

The chapter on the Ktunaxa tribe in the years prior to contact with Euro-Americans, “A Fluid Landscape,” provided a glimpse of the significance to the tribe of the Kootenai River Valley and the vast landscape around it. The Ktunaxa people knew that they had been specially placed in the generous Kootenai environment by their creator, and over the course of generations of existence along its banks the tribe had acquired a keen and intimate knowledge of the river and the surrounding landscape. Like the broad river at the center of their lifecycle, this knowledge base incorporated a fluid and dynamic appreciation of their homeland which was impossible to reduce into linear terms. Though physical barriers such as the region’s rugged mountains and swift rivers presented difficulties for travel, there were no arbitrary barriers which restricted the movement of the Ktunaxa across the landscape.

The appearance of traders and missionaries in the Ktunaxa homeland brought about a few immediate tangible changes to Ktunaxa lifestyles, but as analyzed in the previous chapter, “A Changing Landscape,” the Western understanding of the natural world these men carried with them introduced a much greater threat to Ktunaxa culture. Exemplified by the detailed maps of David Thompson, the early traders along the Kootenai understood the world around them in terms of nations and boundaries. Father De Smet and the Jesuit missionaries that followed furthered this Western understanding

of the natural world and actively worked to detach the Ktunaxa and their neighbors from their own spiritual identity, end the traditional subsistence cycle, and reconfigure the tribe's relationship with the environment. Nonetheless, even after decades of interaction with Euro-Americans along the Kootenai, the tribes remained largely in control of their relationship with these outsiders, taking only what they found to be of benefit from their interactions. However, through small and seemingly insignificant actions, such as drawing the country on maps and relating tribal traits in journals, Western ideology had begun the process of taking the Kootenai River landscape from its traditional inhabitants.

Finally, in "A Land Bounded, A People Divided," this study turned to the eventual effects of the new understanding of the Kootenai River Valley landscape as something to be carved up and owned. In many ways the Hellgate and Oregon treaties represented the final codification of the Western understanding of land as property to be owned and divided onto the traditional Ktunaxa environment. These land allocations, carved up according to a set of human-devised coordinates, reflected an interpretation of land as property which could be owned and sold. The new Euro-American worldview assumed mastery over the Kootenai River Valley landscape by drawing lines on maps, building fences and claiming human ownership over every natural object.

The effects of this transformation in the human understanding of the region's environment have clearly presented serious challenges for both the now-separated bands of Ktunaxa and the Kootenai River Valley landscape itself. In addition to carving up the landscape for new settlers, the new lines drawn across the Kootenai environment threatened not only to sever Ktunaxa family ties, tribal unity and traditional practices, but also to endanger the human relationship with the landscape that had been maintained for

hundreds of years within the Ktunaxa homeland. The intimate knowledge of the land, so important to Ktunaxa cultural identity and history, was maintained by Ktunaxa individuals through their intricately intertwined daily subsistence practices, spiritual observances and the telling of tribal history. This knowledge now stood at a cliff's edge, nearly impossible to preserve in the radically changing world of the late nineteenth century.

In order to understand the sweeping transformations in the human relationship with the Kootenai River Valley environment that took place during the nineteenth century, this work has relied on a combination of ethnographic studies on the Ktunaxa, journals kept by early explorers and missionaries, as well as much of the limited academic research previously undertaken on the tribe. These sources have permitted a broad analysis of Ktunaxa lifestyles and the degree to which they changed as a result of the early interactions with Euro-American outsiders. These documents have also helped to examine how the traders, missionaries and treaty negotiators who traveled into the Kootenai Valley viewed the region's native population and the remarkable Kootenai landscape.

In order to analyze this period through the lens of the meaning of place to a people, this study has also drawn heavily on the work of anthropologist Keith Basso and environmental philosopher David Abram. Though these scholars come from two very different fields of study, and neither of their theoretical understandings of the relationships between native peoples and the natural world were derived specifically from studies of the Ktunaxa tribe, there are a great number of similarities between the situation faced by the Ktunaxa in the nineteenth century and that faced by the Western Apache and

other aboriginal peoples. It is clear from the close relationship the Ktunaxa maintained with the Kootenai River and the surrounding landscape that the natural world constituted much more than an arbitrary assortment of geographical sites but rather held profound meaning for the Ktunaxa people. Among other benefits for the Ktunaxa, their vast, rugged homeland helped to create a common tribal identity, maintain tribal history and teach moral lessons.

As the works of Basso and Abram have helped to uncover, the foundation of the nineteenth century changes for the Ktunaxa and the Kootenai environment were fundamental differences in worldviews between native peoples and the Euro-Americans outsiders that eventually forced the Ktunaxa from their homes. Native peoples such as the Ktunaxa and their neighbors maintained a dynamic relationship with natural phenomena, places, plants and animals through their history, ceremonial practices and daily interactions with the land. According to Abram's *Spell of the Sensuous*, with the introduction of an "alphabetized intellect" reliant upon discursive writing, humans now transferred their knowledge base from the signifying landscape to written symbols on paper. Under this Western worldview, humans could create absolute sources of knowledge independent of the natural world, such as religious texts and maps, to define their place on earth. With this transformation in the human relationship with the surrounding environment, both the natural world and the cultures long intertwined with it faced severe challenges to their future wellbeing.

Two very different understandings of boundaries and the human relationship with the natural world have been presented in this study. In the Ktunaxa worldview, boundaries remained relative and indiscreet, and bands and tribes moved across the

landscape, at times recognizing or rejecting the rights of other native peoples to use portions of their ancestral and spiritual homeland. The Ktunaxa's far-reaching travels across the Rocky Mountains and down the Columbia River revealed both the lack of firm limits to Ktunaxa territory as well as the presence of different degrees of knowledge radiating outward in concentric circles from its Kootenai River Valley epicenter. For the Ktunaxa bands, the surrounding environment was seen as a collection of significant *places*, rather than an abstract *space* that could be carved into various divisions.

In contrast, the radically different Euro-American understanding of boundaries viewed them as absolute political and physical limits to human travel, use and ownership of the environment. The Kootenai River Valley became carved up by geographers, politicians and treaty makers according to a set of human-imposed coordinates. Under this Western concept of boundaries, one always had to be careful not to trespass on another's property rights. It became more important to know who claimed ownership over a piece of land rather than recognizing whose ancestors had lived there for generations. This understanding of boundaries severed the long-practiced human relationship with the environment as humankind assumed dominance over the land by building fences and claiming ownership over nature.

The Ktunaxa have faced enormous challenges in renegotiating a landscape so pivotal to their culture within a new framework determined and forced upon them by others. For such a culture intimately connected with the more-than-human world, the results of a break with past ways of knowing would be profound. According to David Abram,

It should be easy, now, to understand the destitution of indigenous, oral persons who have been forcibly displaced from their traditional lands. The local earth is, for them, the very matrix of discursive meaning; to force them from their native ecology [...] is to render them speechless [...] to dislodge them from the very ground of coherence.<sup>137</sup>

How could such a culture thrive while separated from a land which not only provided sustenance, but which also helped perpetuate its intricate understanding of history and spirituality?

The boundaries created under this new understanding of land presented particularly great difficulties for the Ktunaxa and neighboring tribes. For generations movement through the region had been governed only by geographical challenges. These tribes ranged widely and considered vast and overlapping tracts of terrain as part of their homeland. Suddenly barred from accessing much of the landscape, tribes like the Ktunaxa faced great difficulty maintaining their culture and history, which the landscape had long helped to maintain. Borders separated families and devastated traditional subsistence practices.

While this is certainly the story of the nineteenth-century clash of two radically divergent worldviews meeting along the Kootenai River, it is also an account of the individual actors who, perhaps unknowingly, facilitated enormous changes in the human/nature relationship in this remarkable landscape. The North West and Hudson's Bay Company explorers, such as David Thompson, who traded with the Ktunaxa and their neighbors, found the Kootenai River Valley and its traditional inhabitants to be pleasant, the source of great profit, and vastly different from the world they knew. The missionaries and government officials who followed, men like Father De Smet and

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<sup>137</sup> Abram, 178.

Governor Stevens, also found themselves drawn to the region's people and the bounty of its landscape.

It is unfortunate for the historian that although it is possible to acquire a glimpse into the minds of some of the Euro-American outsiders who left detailed journals of their travels along the Kootenai, it is much more difficult to ascertain the thoughts of the individual Ktunaxa as they engaged in exchanges with these strangers to their homeland. The names and descriptions of a few early nineteenth century leaders, such as Chief Michelle of the Ksanka band, are available to historians. However, the thoughts and actions of the vast majority of the individuals who were most impacted by contact with Euro-Americans and their radically different ideas regarding the land have been lost.

This is certainly not a process that was unique to the Ktunaxa and the place that contributed so greatly to their culture. Many other native peoples in the Americas underwent a similar process of transformation, facing analogous challenges presented by the Euro-American understanding of the land as something to be carved up and divided among individuals. As many scholars have also noted, the introduction of this Western concept of land use and the human relationship with the natural world have also brought profound changes to many other regions across the globe.<sup>138</sup>

While this study broadly describes Ktunaxa use of the Kootenai River landscape in the years prior to contact, further studies of this topic could gain a much deeper understanding of Ktunaxa history from the inclusion of oral interviews with Ktunaxa tribal elders. The cultural committees of each of the bands have worked diligently over

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<sup>138</sup> One notable attempt to synthesize the far-reaching effects of this worldwide transformation is offered in Joachim Radkau, *Nature and Power: A Global History of the Environment* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2008).



the past generations to preserve traditional Ktunaxa knowledge. However, and understandably, the bands continue to be cautious with the further dissemination of sensitive elements of their culture to tribal outsiders. Though the availability of additional information on Ktunaxa culture would expand scholars' understanding of the tribe, what is far more important is that the bands themselves are working to preserve this knowledge by recording interviews with elders, making maps of place names and teaching ceremonial practices to younger generations.

Further research is essential in order to better tell the story of the Ktunaxa tribe as a whole. Too much of the recent work by scholars has followed the divisions forced upon the tribe in the nineteenth century and has focused only on one band or another. It may be more challenging to cross the modern borders in order to interview tribal elders on the different reserves and reservations and conduct research at far-removed archival depositories, but such work is necessary to fully reconstruct the story of the Ktunaxa people.

### *Rebirth of Ktunaxa Tribal Identity*

Throughout the decades of dominance of the Western mapmakers' worldview over the Kootenai landscape, members of the Ktunaxa tribe have been able to maintain much of their traditional culture, including an appreciation of the meaning of landscape, in spite of the overwhelming influence of this Euro-American approach to the environment in American and Canadian society. Though access to much of their traditional homeland was limited, tribal members have striven to preserve their relationship with the landscape so vital to Ktunaxa culture. Oral histories have been

passed down, ceremonies have continued to be held, and traditional ways of hunting, gathering, building and garment-making have been preserved.

When faced with the death-knell to tribal culture posed by 1950s-era Termination policy in the United States, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes on the Flathead Reservation fought back and retained recognition of themselves as sovereign peoples.<sup>139</sup> Under the Dawes Act of 1887, vast swaths of the reservation land negotiated at Council Grove with Governor Stevens had become the property of non-tribal members. The large influx of American settlers, coupled with improving living conditions for the Salish and the Ksanka band of the Ktunaxa, made the reservation an early target for the severance of the continuing special relationship between the federal government and the tribes. Only the resolute effort by a determined group of tribal leaders, including prominent Flathead Reservation-born Native American activist D'Arcy McKickle, preserved the tribes' sovereign status and treaty rights, helping to bring about an end to further attempts by the federal government at terminating the treaties of other native peoples.

In recent decades a remarkable renaissance in tribal identity has taken place among the separated Ktunaxa bands. An extraordinary degree of public cultural pride has emerged on both sides of the U.S.-Canadian border. Interest among the younger generations in the traditions of their ancestors has flourished as tribal culture is once again celebrated not only at home, but in the schools and within the larger community. As part of a larger movement among American Indian nations, a tribal college was

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<sup>139</sup> An excellent discussion of the how the Confederated Salish and Kootenai resisted termination policy is offered in Jaakko Puisto. "This is my Reservation, I Belong Here: The Salish Kootenai Struggle Against Termination," PhD diss. (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona State University, 2000).

chartered in Pablo in 1977 on the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Reservation, and spiritual ceremonies and dances are once again held without fear of repression.<sup>140</sup>

Perhaps most significantly, the Ktunaxa language, so distinct from any others, has been kept alive through the dedication of tribal elders. Even during times when the speaking of native languages by Ktunaxa youth was prohibited at school, cultural leaders worked hard to preserve the unique Ktunaxa language. From a low point of only a handful of fluent speakers in the early twentieth century, the future of the Ktunaxa tongue as a living language is now much more secure. Ktunaxa is now taught in public schools on several reservations and reserves, and the younger members of the tribe are increasingly interested in learning the language of their ancestors.

Several of the Ktunaxa bands have turned the great challenges of the Western lifestyle forced upon them during the times of treaty negotiations and the problems of early reservation life into profitable business ventures. On the U.S. side of the border, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai tribes now own and operate a series of successful companies including a bank, hotels, and an innovative aerospace company that has worked on projects for NASA and the U.S. Air Force.<sup>141</sup> Another particularly interesting example is the St. Eugene Mission Resort; in a remarkable act of reappropriation, several of the northern Ktunaxa bands have turned the former St. Eugene's Mission and residential boarding school into a successful hotel, casino and golf course.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Salish Kootenai College, "About," <http://www.skcc.edu/?q=about>.

<sup>141</sup> Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, "Tribal Affiliated Businesses," <http://www.cskt.org/about/affiliated.htm>

<sup>142</sup> St. Eugene Golf Resort and Casino, <http://www.steugene.ca.html>.

In the United States, members of the Ksanka and A-Kanqlahalxu bands of the Ktunaxa tribe have also proven to be successful over the past decades in negotiating federal and state cultural and natural resource laws in order to help protect especially significant places within the their traditional landscape which are currently administered by government land management agencies. Unfortunately, laws such as the National Environmental Policy Act and the National Historic Properties Act, rather than reflecting the traditions of native peoples, are products of the Western map-making, boundary-creating mindset.<sup>143</sup> These laws undoubtedly provide some level of protection, but in order for traditionally important features of the landscape to be recognized under these laws, Ktunaxa elders are forced to provide sensitive cultural information to government officials in order to defend the significance of such a place. They then must negotiate with federal officials in order to establish specific boundaries for such features, even though none ever existed traditionally.

If greater protection is to be achieved for the Ktunaxa landscape and the important role it plays in the tribe's culture, then there must be an increased appreciation for the substantial differences between traditional Ktunaxa and Western understandings of what the land means and whether it should be owned or divided. In some cases, it may be necessary to take at face value a native culture's identification of a site as an important place for maintaining tribal culture and not force the tribes to divulge delicate spiritual information to the public. Though government land managers may find the implications challenging, it is also necessary that native tribes such as the Ktunaxa not continue to be

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<sup>143</sup> National Environmental Policy Act, Pub. L. 91-190, 42 U.S.C. 4321-4347, January 1, 1970, and the National Historic Properties Act, Pub. L. 97-258, § 4(b), Sept. 13, 1982, and Public Law 89-665; 80 STAT.915; 16 U.S.C. 470.

forced to adopt outside concepts such as map lines and boundaries. Though now separated by an international border, groups such as the five Ktunaxa bands in Canada should also be allowed to play a role in protecting their traditional homeland across the border. Incorporating these changes will not be easy, but if these laws truly aim to protect indigenous cultures, then the government should not stipulate a simultaneous challenge to these very cultures as part of the process.

The transformation in the human relationship with the environment that occurred over the course of the nineteenth century along the Kootenai River also suggests other, more universal, lessons. As an analogous revolution has occurred in the role the natural world has played in the lives of many other cultures during the last few centuries, many peoples worldwide are facing situations that are strikingly similar to the Ktunaxa as they try to preserve their traditions, history, and identity. Just as momentous are the abysmal effects this change has had on a multitude of local landscapes and the global environment.

One significant lesson which emerges from the story of the Ktunaxa is the continued danger posed to cultural survival by the forced imposition of Western concepts of land ownership and the introduction of arbitrary boundary lines. Around the globe, indigenous peoples have been forced to accept the ramifications of boundaries that have been created in far-off capitals by officials with little consideration of the peoples who would be affected for generations. Native peoples have been removed from their homelands to make way for outsiders to take possession of the lands. The Western concept of land ownership and property rights has been posited as giving these outsiders permission to exploit the natural world for monetary gain regardless of the consequences.

All of these issues pose challenges to cultural survival by dividing relatives and separating people from the land which has helped shape and maintain their cultural identity. The implications of addressing these problems are extraordinarily profound for today's capitalistic nation-states. Nonetheless, thought must be given to the detrimental effects of land removal, property lines, and illogical borders for peoples such as the Ktunaxa, and non-Western relationships with the land deserve study and appreciation rather than blind rejection.

A second lesson which is suggested by the story of the Kootenai Valley is becoming increasingly relevant in a world facing climate change and other environmental challenges. The destructive effects of the Western understanding of land as something to be owned and divided have led to extraordinary degrees of exploitation of the natural world. For a society which maintains little respect for the natural world, there are few ethical restraints guiding the actions of humans toward the environment. As science has begun to demonstrate the extensive effects this rampant mistreatment of the land has had on the more-than-human world, increasing attempts have been made to curb this abuse. Today, the interconnectivity between all species within an ecosystem and the effects of environmental destruction on humans are increasingly recognized. However, these are not new concepts as this discussion of the Ktunaxa and the Kootenai River has demonstrated. The Ktunaxa involvement with the natural world entailed a reciprocal relationship with the land which respected the Kootenai Valley ecosystem. Their subsistence lifecycle was based on seasonal changes and the physical traits of the region's geography. There is evidently much to learn from this approach for those looking for ways to address the environmental destruction of the present.

For thousands of years in the Kootenai Valley region, humans moved with the landscape, which served an important role as a maintainer of tribal culture, history, and identity. Over the course of the nineteenth century, a new ideology that viewed the land as the object of ownership and division through unnatural barriers came to dominate the region. Ktunaxa traditions have managed to survive two centuries of assault, and their continued presence must be recognized and respected.

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